

Video Watchdog®



Douglas E. Winter on
DR. MABUSE!

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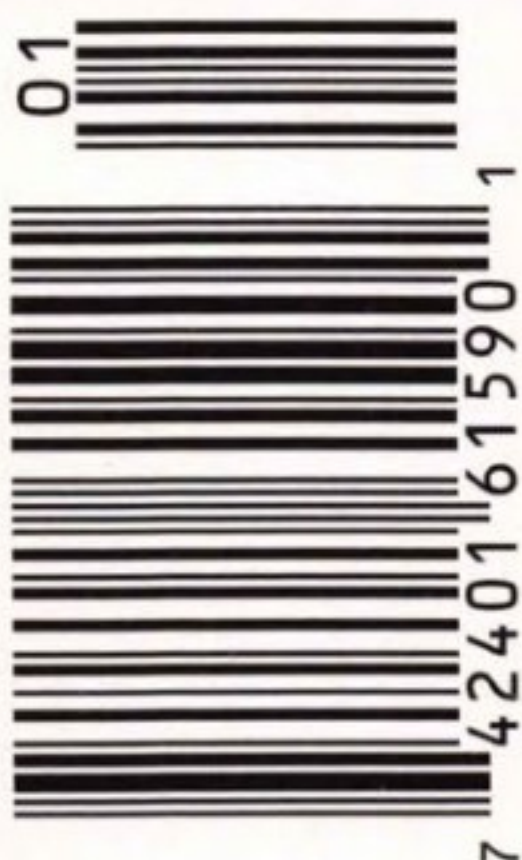


All Review Issue!

JOE DANTE on AMICUS!
Kim Newman's Vampire Stake-out!
AMELIE! INGA! VISITOR Q!

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Video Watchdog®

the Perfectionist's
Guide to
Fantastic Video

No. 91 / JAN 2003

*"In criticism, I will be bold, and as sternly,
absolutely just with friend and foe. From this
purpose nothing shall turn me."*

—Edgar Allan Poe

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Roger Corman's Vampire Collection 4

ANNO DRACULA author *Kim Newman* puts the bite on the six undead *uberwerks* collected in New Concorde's "The Vampire Collection": **BLOOD TIES**, **CLUB VAMPIRE**, **DRACULA RISING**, **NIGHT HUNTER**, **TO SLEEP WITH A VAMPIRE** and **VAMPIRELLA!**

Joseph W. Sarno

Tim Lucas critiques an assortment of dewy delicacies by the master of psychological sex—the "Florida Trilogy" of **DESIRE UNDER THE PALMS**, **THE ODD TRIANGLE** and **THE LAYOUT** (p. 10), **THE YOUNG EROTIC FANNY HILL** (p. 20), and his biggest success, the made-in-Sweden **INGA** (p. 45)!

Front: Anthony Perkins in his final starring role on the big screen, as the murderous Jack Hyde in MGM Home Entertainment's **EDGE OF SANITY** (1989).

Inside: "Well, she was just 17, if you know what I mean..." Marie Liljedahl makes a memorable screen debut in Joseph Sarno's **INGA** (1968), now available from Retro-Seduction Cinema.

Back: Jon Pertwee as a movie vampire accursed by his own cloak in the Amicus production of **THE HOUSE THAT DRIPPED BLOOD** (1973), a now out-of-print title from Prism Home Entertainment.

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JOAN THE MAID, and so much more!

KENNEL

JOHN CHARLES, our Associate Editor, reviews Asian DVD and VCD releases on his website, Hong Kong Digital (www.dighkmovies.com).

SHANE M. DALLMANN is thinking of a classic horror film that hasn't been subjected to either a sequel or a remake... but he's not about to give anyone any ideas.

JOE DANTE's movie-in-progress, **LOONEY TUNES: BACK IN ACTION**, will feature the big screen comebacks of such beloved '50s icons as Ro-Man, the Man from Planet X, and the Metaluna Mutant.

CHARLIE LARGENT recommends Micilis' in Hollywood. On Fridays, the usual servers are replaced by singers whose operatic outbursts are the perfect soundtrack for the yummy fettuccine—and all requests for "Cat Scratch Fever" go unheeded.

TIM LUCAS has finished his mammoth book

MARIO BAVA: ALL THE COLORS OF THE DARK and is now editing the final text.

KIM NEWMAN has been contracted by Little Bird Films (**CROUPIER**, **BRIDGET JONES' DIARY**) to write a screenplay based on his forthcoming novel, **AN ENGLISH GHOST STORY**.

RICHARD HARLAND SMITH has written a definitive study of the **RING** movies, which will appear in the next issue of VW.

REBECCA & SAM UMLAND reviewed **JOAN THE MAID** for this issue, just to keep it from becoming a complete smut-fest.

DOUGLAS E. WINTER's biography **CLIVE BARKER: THE DARK FANTASTIC** is now available in a signed, slipcase edition of (\$75) from Cemetery Dance Publications, limited to 750 copies and including exclusive full color artwork by Barker, as well as "some unique surprises not found in the mass-market edition."

VW THANKS:

All Day Entertainment (David Kalat), Anchor Bay Entertainment (Jay Douglas, Perry Martin, Maral Kaloustian/Sue Procko PR), Blue Underground (William Lustig, David Gregory), Juanita Bowman, El Independent Cinema/Retro-Seduction Cinema (Michael Raso), Facets Video (Ray Privett), Image Entertainment (Spencer Savage), Kino on Video (Rodrigo Brandao), McFarland and Company, Media Blasters/Shriek Show (Carl Morano), MGM Home Entertainment (Steve Wegner), Miramax Home Entertainment, New Concorde Home Video (Doug Lowell), Paramount Home Video, Poker Industries (Michael Basden), Joe Sarno, Something Weird Video (Mike Vraney, Lisa Petrucci), Peggy Steffans, Synapse Films (Don May Jr., Jerry Chandler), Tai-Seng Video Marketing (Frank Djeng), Trash Palace (Brian D. Horrorwitz), 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, and our subscribers, contributors, correspondents and distributors—as we boldly step into the Year of the Bava Book: 2003!

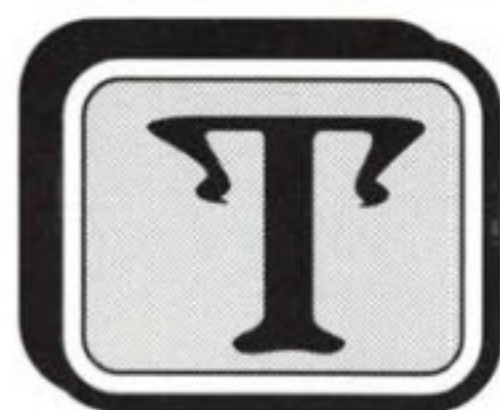
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THE WATCHDOG BARKS



HERE'S a line from an old George Carlin standup routine where he asks, "Have you ever been watching a movie on the late late show and realize that everyone in a crowd scene is dead?" It was funny then, but I have to admit, it's less funny now—especially after adding a tenth name to this issue's dedication. These things are supposed to come in threes, which is bad enough—but *tens*?

Jonathan Harris became an icon for my generation when he played Dr. Zachary Smith on the CBS-TV series *LOST IN SPACE* between 1965 and 1968. Fey, alliterative, hissably duplicitous and avaricious, Dr. Smith was somehow loveable despite everything else he was. More than once he sold the souls of the Space Family Robinson for a pile of precious metals he couldn't possibly cash in, but he was always forgiven. He died November 3 in hospital (where he was being treated for the chronic back problem Smith always used to spare himself the indignity of menial labor) from a blood clot in his heart, just a few days shy of his 88th birthday.

Richard Harris had a distinguished career on stage and in films, an arc of 40+ years that ran from Cyril Frankel's **ALIVE AND KICKING** to **HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS**, but you can have them all, so long as I can keep "MacArthur Park." He calls it "MacArthur's Park" throughout the song, but it's such a divine take that composer/producer Jimmy Webb didn't dare correct him. He melted in the dark of Hodgkin's disease at age 72.

Cheryl "Rainbeaux" Smith—a blonde, willowy, sleepy-eyed starlet remembered for her star turn in Richard Blackburn's **LEMORA: A CHILD'S TALE OF THE SUPERNATURAL** and her supporting roles in such '70s exploitation classics as Jonathan Demme's **CAGED HEAT** and Jack Hill's **THE SWINGING CHEERLEADERS**—recently died at age 47 of hepatitis—presumably, heroin-related hepatitis. Homeless, addicted and destitute for long periods after her disappearance from the screen in the early 1980s, she projected a rare vulnerability onscreen that will now always remind us of her unhappy fate. (Keeping track? That's only three so far, but already two Harris and two Smiths.)

Also gone are *André de Toth*, best-known for directing the 3D classic **HOUSE OF WAX**, but also responsible for some great *films noir* and the Steve Reeves *pepla* **MORGAN THE PIRATE**; *Nathan Juran*, the director of such '50s cult favorites as **THE 7TH VOYAGE OF SINBAD** and **ATTACK OF THE 50 FOOT WOMAN**; *Herman Cohen*, the producer of **I WAS A TEENAGE WEREWOLF**, **HOW TO MAKE A MONSTER**, **HORRORS OF THE BLACK MUSEUM**, **TROG** and many others; and *Sid Pink*, the Florida-based producer of **THE ANGRY RED PLANET**, **REPTILICUS**, **PYRO** and **THE CASTILIAN**. In the latter two films, Pink awarded early supporting roles to a young Portuguese actress named Soledad Miranda, predating her starring roles for Jess Franco. I'm the proud owner of a copy of Pink's autobiography, which he inscribed, "To Soledad Miranda's Number 1 Fan, from the Man Who Discovered Her."

Peggy Moran, the sweet-faced heroine of **THE MUMMY'S HAND** ("Do you mind if I say I think you're a swell person?"), died at age 84 of myriad complications inflicted by a tragic, needless automobile accident. And dying of a heart attack at age 63 on November 3 was HK actor/director *Lo Lieh*, who starred in **FIVE FINGERS OF DEATH** (the HK film that launched the "kung fu" movie craze in America in 1973) and appeared in numerous fantasy films over the years, including **REVENGE OF THE ZOMBIES**, **HUMAN SKIN LANTERNS** and **GHOSTS GALORE**.

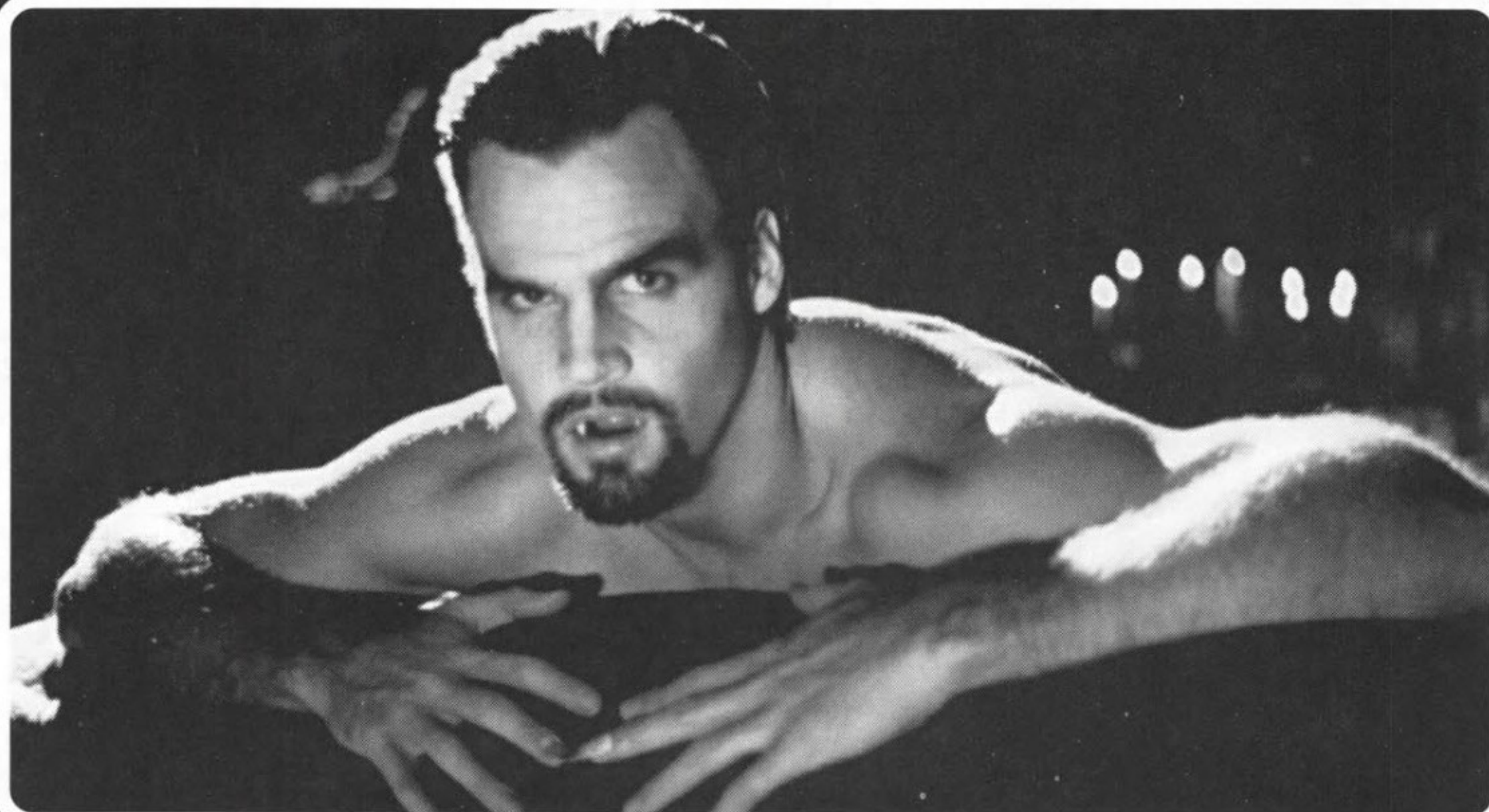
Last but not least, we've lost director/special effects artist *Antonio Margheriti*—"The Third Man of Italian Fantasy," as we called him when he was interviewed in *VW #28* by Peter Blumenstock. The man responsible for **CASTLE OF BLOOD** (just released on DVD by Synapse Films), **HORROR CASTLE**, **THE LONG HAIR OF DEATH**, **WILD WILD PLANET** and many others died on November 4 of a heart attack, at the age of 72. Even more tragically, when I shared this unhappy news with Peter via e-mail, he wrote back to tell me that his father had died on the same day, also at age 72.

With so many names, this issue's dedication looked too crowded to serve as an adequate acknowledgement of the wonderful work these people left behind, so I'll give this page to them instead, as I mutter "The pain, oh the pain..."

.....**Tim Lucas**

WATCHDOG NEWS

ROGER CORMAN'S VAMPIRE COLLECTION



A DVD Stake-Out by Kim Newman

Roger Corman's New Concorde label has released six disparate movies from their back catalogue on Region 1 DVD as "The Vampire Collection," with an appetizing individual price of \$9.98. A mix of direct-to-video and made-for-television films, the quality is mostly what you'd expect from the sub-strata of genre, though none is entirely without interest. Though the films present radically different (and mutually irreconcilable) versions of the vampire myth—ranging from traditional supernatural animated corpses, through earthly species separate from humanity, to

plague-spreaders from outer space—this job-lot does have some thematic consistency in the frequency with which vampires are depicted as a troubled, parasitic race apart dwelling on the fringes of human society, patronizing Los Angeles pole-dancing clubs (a New Concorde staple) or yearning for some species of dark romantic fulfillment. Another recurrent aspect, familiar from *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*, is that vampires are the only violent group in America who don't own guns, preferring to have close-up martial arts battles with stake-wielding humans who could easily be shot dead from across the room.

BLOOD TIES (1991, DD-2.0/+ , 83m 55s) differs from the others in that it was made for television—not as part of Showtime's ROGER CORMAN PRESENTS series, but produced by Gene Corman and directed by Jim McBride (**GLEN AND RANDA, THE BIG EASY**). After the murder of a Texas couple by spade-bearded Bo Hopkins (**MUTANT**) and his the Southern Coalition

Doug Wert's life is changed by a close encounter with Dracula's son (Christopher Atkins), in DRACULA RISING. Background: Talisa Soto as VAMPIRELLA.

Against Vampirism, the victims' wounded son Cody (**THE RAGE: CARRIE 2**'s Jason London) escapes to LA and gets mixed up with various representatives of his vampire heritage. Harry Martin aka Harlovan Martinescu (Harley Venton), a "Carpathian-American" reporter who feels that it is time to "come out of the coffin," is at odds with community leader Eli Cherlovian (**THE RAPTURE**'s Patrick Bauchau), a powerful businessman with a Corleone-like tendency to corrupt the system to his own ends. Harry is also torn between a longstanding affair with Eli's slinky sister Celia (**WAXWORK**'s Michelle Johnson), who has a habit of scaling buildings in a brief black evening dress, and a possible romance with the Assistant District Attorney (**SPELLCASTER**'s Kim Johnston Ulrich) who is prosecuting Eli's tearaway nephew Butch Vlad (**RAVAGER**'s Salvator Xuereb). As the hunters, who include a fanatical Grace Zabriskie (**TWIN PEAKS**), track down "the nest," Harry tries to persuade Cody not to be lured into following "the old ways." It all ends with a rumble between hunters and vampires as the killjoys try to burn Celia at the stake and Eli insists on private justice.

It's a little tame (the most dangerous bloodsuckers are breakdancing graffiti artists on motorbikes, and action scenes consist of scrappy punch-ups around bonfires) but the lead performances are unforced and interesting, and there is wit in McBride's depiction of vampires as an ethnic community with a whole range of attitudes to regular humanity. Refusal to kill off characters who might be useful later marks **BLOOD TIES** as at least a covert series pilot: though it was not picked up, Bauchau essentially reprised his role in the short-lived, very similarly-themed

KINDRED: THE EMBRACED. The Shrike Gang's murals are credited to "David Holzman," fictional hero of McBride's first film, **DAVID HOLZMAN'S DIARY** (1968). Though the script is credited solely to executive producer Richard Shapiro, noted Californian horror writer Dennis Etchison contributed heavily to the story and background. One of the film's key locations is the famous Frank Lloyd Wright mansion on Los Feliz Boulevard that provided the exteriors of William Castle's **HOUSE ON HAUNTED HILL** (1958); here we get to see the actual interior rooms, as well.

DRACULA RISING (1992; DD-2.0/SS/+, 79m 52s), shot in Bulgaria by Fred Gallo (**DEAD SPACE**), might have been seen in the year of Francis Coppola's **BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA** as a timely follow-up for Roger Corman's **FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND**, perhaps as an alternative to adapting Brian W. Aldiss' novel **DRACULA UNBOUND**. A combination of the weary reincarnation-of-the-vampire's-lost-love theme with the good vampire/bad vampire polarity familiar from straight-to-video imitations (**TO DIE FOR**, **NIGHTLIFE**, etc.) even before **INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE** got filmed, **DRACULA RISING** is a derivative little picture, indifferent overall but spasmodically intriguing. In Romania to restore a portrait of Vlad the Impaler, heroine Stacy Travis (**HARDWARE**) flashes back to an earlier life where she fell for Vlad's monk son (**THE BLUE LAGOON**'s Christopher Atkins) and got burned for witchcraft, prompting her lover to accept the family curse and become a vampire. Atkins tries to get it right this time round but another ex-monk vampire (Doug Wert) causes trouble. Despite Zahari Vatahov's unusual Dracula (an iron-masked barbarian rather

than a suave Devil), this suffers from bland prettyboy Atkins and feeble jokes ("We like to call this Blood Lite."). The climactic magic duel, taking place in a semi-**ANGRY RED PLANET** look pink-lit void with skulls on poles, harks back to Corman's **THE RAVEN** before doing a bat attack stunt from Hammer's **KISS OF THE VAMPIRE**. The weird sound mix (at least on this disc) mutes Ed Tomney's score, lending it a droning/dreamlike **KEEP/VAMPYR** feel that still boils down to being rather dull. Co-writer Rodman Flender, later director of **THE UNBORN** and **IDLE HANDS**, might have made more of the film than Gallo.

Ostensibly the most interesting item in the collection, **TO SLEEP WITH A VAMPIRE** (1992, DD-2.0/SS/+, 76m 13s) is a bit of a cheat. Its script, credited to Patricia Harrington, is actually the lightest-possible rewrite of Katt Shea Ruben & Andy Ruben's screenplay for Katt Shea Ruben's **DANCE OF THE DAMNED** (1988). Corman backed the original only four years before green-lighting this remake, which fails to credit its source. There are variations between the two versions, with the remake perhaps spelling out character bits implied in the original, but essentially they are the same film as director Adam Friedman goes for a marginally glossier approach while quoting the Ruben-Ruben dialogue mostly verbatim. Suicidal stripper Nina (**MERIDIAN**'s Charlie Spradling) catches the attention of a vampire (**CARNOSAUR 3: PRIMAL SPECIES**' Scott Valentine) who preys only on those who have given up on life, and they spend a night together with the plot's promise that one will be finally dead by dawn. There are a few new notes: a significant scene played out in front of

This promo shot of *VAMPIRELLA*'s Talisa Soto shows her modelling the classic Vampi outfit—which doesn't appear in the film itself.



a "Bush Lies" graffiti which could refer either to a President or a sexually-alluring female, the protagonists both dress entirely in black but for a splash of scarlet (his boutonniere, her hair-tie). Spradling is more like an airbrushed centerfold than **DANCE**'s Starr Andreeff, and gives a more conventional, actressy performance as she bares her soul after showing her body; while Valentine's rumpled teen idol-type vampire, who withholds his name (Jacob) until the sunrise, isn't quite as mysterious as Cyril O'Reilly's loner, though Friedman stages his sudden bursts of superspeed effectively.

NIGHT HUNTER (1995, DD-2.0/SS/+, 85m 47s), directed by **THE UNBORN II**'s Rick Jacobson, is an attempt by Corman-made star Don "The Dragon" Wilson to break away from the formula of his **BLOOD-FIST** series, though this effort—produced not by Corman, but action specialist Ashok Amritraj—is still at least as much kung fu as horror as it trundles from one warehouse fight scene to the next. In a scenario influenced by Marvel Comics and role-playing games, and predating films like **BLADE** and **VAMPIRES**, Jack Cutter (Wilson) is the last of a line of vampire hunters, avenging his parents (killed in a pre-titles scene that strangely inverts the opening of **BLOOD TIES**) by doing away with long-lived blood-suckers who can only be killed (in a fresh touch) by having their spines snapped. Tabloid reporter Raimy Baker (**TRANCERS III**'s Melanie Smith) gets involved with the crusade and turns out, in a vestigial sub-plot, to be the reincarnation of the lost love of vampire king Bruno Fischer (**PUPPET MASTER 5**'s Nicholas Guest). William C. Martell's script is full of in-joke character names, some (deliberately?) misspelled:

"Roy Ward," "Sid O'Mack," "Browning," "Tournier," "Carmella," "Argento," "Hooper," "Sangster," "Ulmer," "Pabst," "Castle." Though Wilson is, as always, a personable and graceful hero, **NIGHT HUNTER** suffers from the lack of serious villainy, with Guest never turning on the heat as the Dracula substitute. "Badder than Blade," the unattributed sleeve quote, is all too appropriate.

Jim Wynorski's **VAMPIRELLA** (1996, DD-2.0/SS/+, 86m 28s), adapted from the Warren comic book once developed for the screen (but never successfully filmed) by Hammer, premiered as an installment of **ROGER CORMAN PRESENTS**. Created by Forrest J Ackerman, the comic character was a schizoid mix of adolescent-appeal girlie art in the style of Jean-Claude Forest's **BARBARELLA** and childish plotting and writing straight out of the 1940s. Screenwriter Gary Gerani takes FJA's loony premise (vampires come from the planet Drakulon, where blood flows in rivers) and tosses in **MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E.** business about Operation Purge, a government anti-vampire operation. An amazingly-cast Roger Daltrey is Vlad, Count Dracula, an ancient alien vampire passing himself off as Jamie Blood, a lame rock star with hair extensions. After Vlad murders the benevolent High Elder of Drakulon (**PHANTASM**'s Angus Scrimm) and flees in a stock footage spaceship from **GALAXY OF TERROR**, Ella (**LICENSE TO KILL**'s Talisa Soto), the ruler's stepdaughter, heads off in pursuit but is sidelined by a crash-landing on Mars. "30,000 years later" on Earth, Vlad has sired a race of vampire gangsters and is plotting to extinguish the sun. Ella gets a lift on a space-shuttle (co-piloted by John Landis, who alludes to **IT! THE TERROR FROM BEYOND SPACE**) and

hops back on the vengeance trail. Though the first thugs she meets nickname her "Miss T&A" for her odd outfit, a passing nerd named Forry Ackerman (Robert B. Katz) names her "Vampirella." She hooks up with Adam Van Helsing (**OBLIVION**'s Richard Joseph Paul) and tracks Vlad to Las Vegas, where a messy confrontation at Boulder Dam cops the already-quite-bad-enough ending of **SCARS OF DRACULA**.

Less successful in its mélange of pulp influences than Wynorski's **THE LOST EMPIRE**, **VAMPIRELLA** has the feel of a skimmed project. A sleeve still shows Soto sporting something close to the original, revealing comic book costume; in the film itself, she is strapped into an unflattering outfit on the (perhaps likely) grounds that it would be impossible to do action scenes in the comic book costume without continually "popping out." Soto is athletic and smoldering, but doesn't have the stature or sense of humor needed for such an impossible character: most fan suggestions (Julie Strain, Brinke Stevens, etc.) for the role couldn't have managed the character's odd innocence, but Charlie Spradling might have been a good choice. Daltrey, who allegedly took the role because the late Keith Moon was a big Vampi fan, is among the least impressive screen Draculas and, even sadder, comes across in his Jamie Blood act as a sub-**AUSTIN POWERS** caricature of himself. Full of bizarre concepts (a gun that projects artificial sunlight, hypodermic injections of holy water, vampires in protective suits modelled on **PLANET OF THE VAMPIRES**), this is still too makeshift to qualify even as camp. Limp fight scenes are overdubbed with foley punches that sound like Sonny Liston pounding watermelons and a few

near-extras contribute Wynorski's trademark naked silicone breasts. Alone in the collection, **VAMPIRELLA** boasts a director's commentary track, which points out all the stock footage and trivial references, laments the lack of money and time and generally provides good company for a second viewing of the film. Wynorski pats himself on the back for featuring a scene in which a human hero offers his vampire-love-interest blood to fortify her prior to the final battle, well before the idea was used on **BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER** and in **BLADE** but—*nyah nyah nyah nyah*—the exact same situation occurs in my 1992 novel **ANNO DRACULA**, which precedes them all! This "director's cut" release restores some footage, including Daltrey's song and a cameo by the authentic FJA (who stands out in a Vegas rock club like the sort of gurning extra any editor would snip from a scene).

The most recent film in the bunch is **CLUB VAMPIRE** (1997, DD-2.0/SS/+, 91m 6s), another oddball mix of strippers and suckers and melancholy ("I'm weary of shadows and cellars, darkness and blood. If I could only see the sun, I'd feel almost human again."). Written and directed by Andy Ruben (evidently not holding a grudge over **TO SLEEP WITH A VAMPIRE**), **CLUB VAMPIRE** derives some details and plot twists from **THE ADDICTION** and brings back **DANCE OF THE DAMNED**'s Starr Andreoff as Corri, a single mom who works in an "underground" club that requires strippers to strut around in fetish gear disguises (including a vampire costume). Corri is admired from below the runway by Zero (**CARNOSAUR 2**'s John Savage), a thousand-year-old

vampire with lip-piercings and bondage trousers who has in recent decades refrained from killing. Zero hangs out with more predatory bloodsuckers, a mini-coven led by Alko (Mariam Parris), a snippy British apparent teenager who whines about her disciples' pay-per-view tastes ("Who ordered **MUSCLEMANIA**?"). Laura (Diana Frank), Alko's nastiest follower, attacks Corri out of spite, but a drop of her blood falls into the victim's mouth. Corri begins painfully to transform into a vampire, compelled to eat her son's pet hamster and vomiting up a long string of internal organs. Ordered to exterminate the new-born vampire, Zero opts instead to tutor her. The dwarf Kiddo (**TWIN PEAKS**' Michael Anderson) free-associates about popular culture between his own nasty attacks.

Less successful in its skewed philosophizing than **DANCE OF THE DAMNED** (or even **TO SLEEP WITH A VAMPIRE**), clumsy in most of its dance/horror sequences, and a muddy watch and listen, **CLUB VAMPIRE** does have strange characterizations to recommend it, with especially committed, weird line readings from Savage, Parris and Anderson. Among the minor mysteries of the Undead is how (and why) a creature, which regenerates a ripped-out tongue and instantaneously heals stab-wounds, would get a piercing. Though not listed as any kind of "director's cut," this DVD release runs nearly 15m longer than the 77m running time listed on the sleeve (and in most reference sources), and so might be an untouted restoration of the filmmaker's intended version. A glance at the mostly negative reviews of its video incarnation (not available to this

reviewer) suggests that sacrificing non-plot scenes, that nevertheless provide the most entertainment in the film, might well have made a shorter version seem a lot feebler. Of all the films in the collection, **CLUB VAMPIRE** seems the cheapest. It is certainly in the roughest state: an intermittent, coughy crackle on the soundtrack, apparently a fault of the transfer rather than a representation of the original elements, is especially distracting.

The fullscreen transfers ("digitally remastered") on all the films are acceptable, but display a variety of original elements—from TV movie pristine (**BLOOD TIES**) to ex-rental grainy (**CLUB VAMPIRE**). Each disc contains a trailer for the feature attraction and a selection of coming attractions for other titles in the collection. Aside from the **VAMPIRELLA** commentary, the only other extras are thumbnail bios of the usual odd cross selection of creatives—Roger Corman gets the full treatment even on films he was barely involved with, while some directors don't rate even a list of credits. —Kim Newman

Spice is the Variety of Life

Our less timid readers may find a good deal of cinematic arcana worth perusing in **CUMMING SOON!** (74m 18s), a new DVD trailer compilation on the "Lucky Banana" label of 31 hardcore XXX trailers from 1970-80. Not to be confused with the content of an identically titled VHS compilation sold by Alpha Blue Archives, this collection isn't something we found particularly erotic—for us, it started out funny and got tired fairly fast—but we found it interesting throughout



John Holmes must worm his way out of a Nazi hellhole in 1980's PRISONER OF PARADISE, one of many vintage XXX trailers featured in CUMMING SOON!

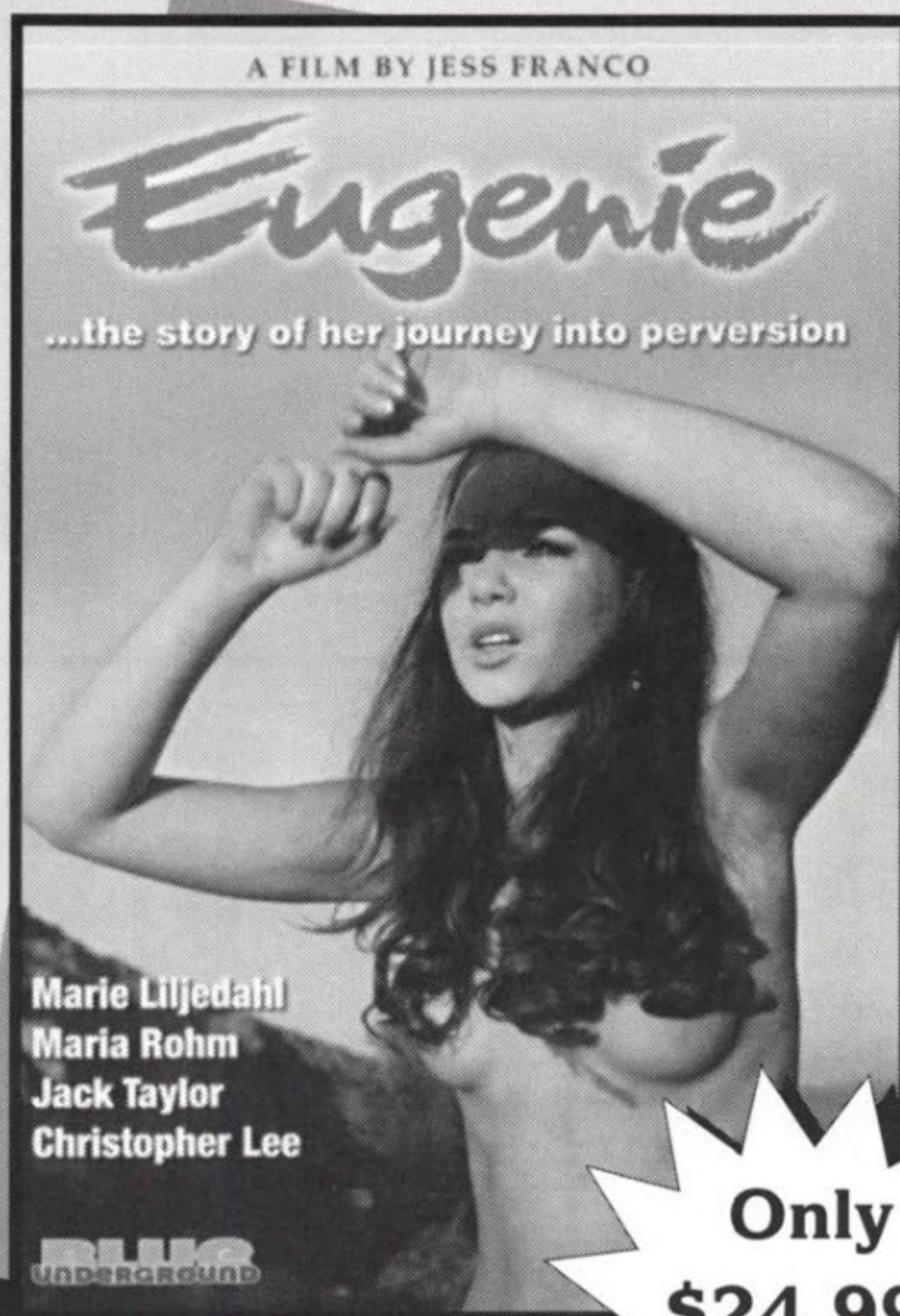
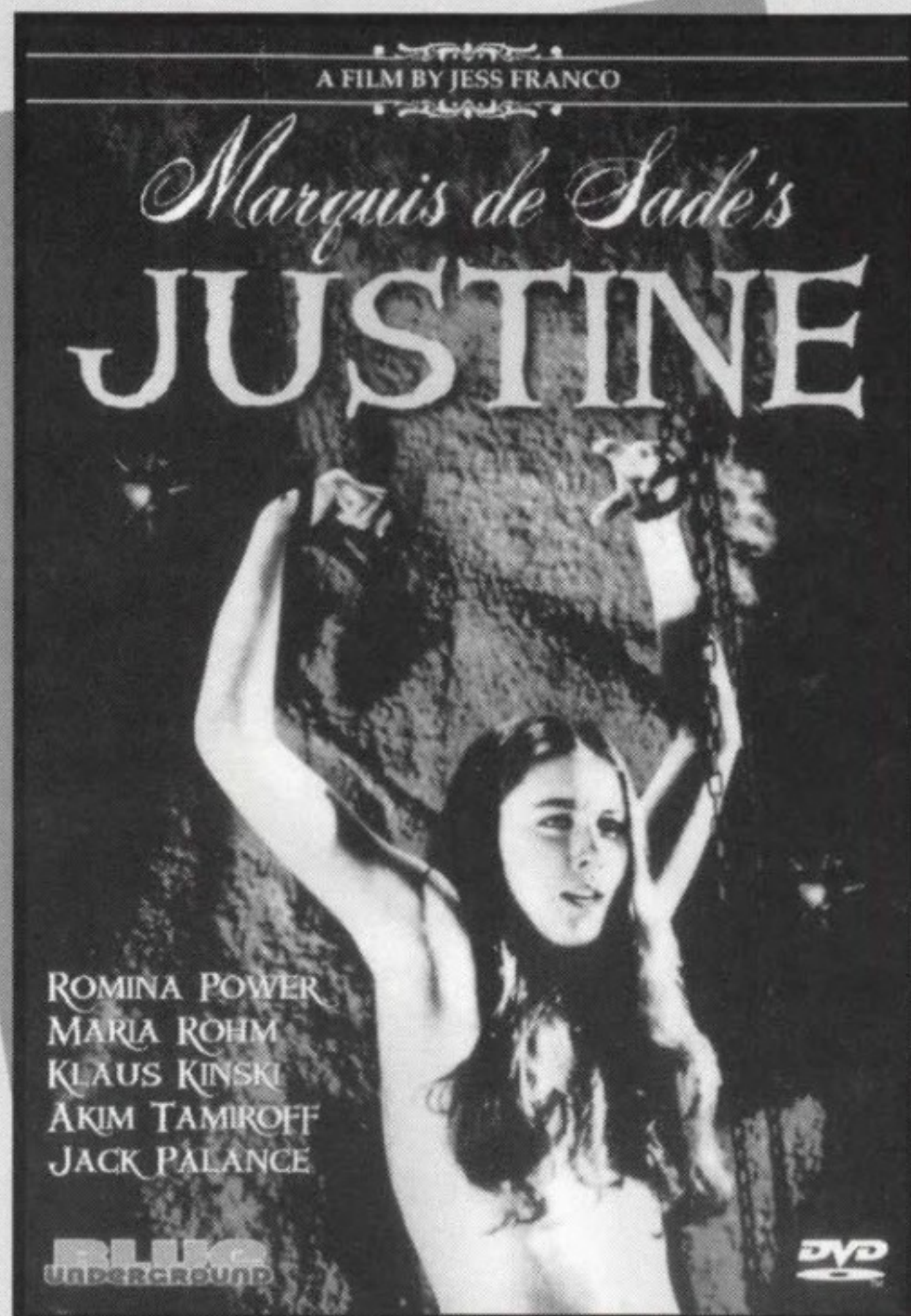
for other reasons. These trailers offer a goldmine of useful trivia: **THE DEVIL IN MISS JONES** incorporates music copped from John Barry's score for **GOLDFINGER**; **SOMETIME SWEET SUSAN** features a brief appearance by a well-groomed, bespectacled actor we suddenly realized was **GURU THE MAD MONK** himself, Neil Flanagan; **PASTRIES** features Uschi Digart ('nuff said); and **SEX WISH** is scored with Bernard Herrmann's music for **NORTH BY NORTHWEST** and **PSYCHO**, to mention just a few oddities. Other trailers have genre relevance (**THE POSSESSION**, 1976), connections to pulp and detective fiction (**CHINA LUST** is about the search for a magic jade dildo, and there are several spots here for the P.I. spoofs of John Holmes, later spoofed in **BOOGIE NIGHTS**); and still others are simply jaw-dropping in what they will do or say to sell a ticket (the bewildered trailer for **REFLECTIONS** asks, "Since *when* is it wrong to have

sex with members of your own family?"). The trailers are presented in chronological sequence, and in terms of quality, they appear to have been sourced from a VHS master and look like you would expect them to look if you saw them at a grindhouse back in the '70s—generally worn but watchable, some better than others. The cover menu mentions a 32nd trailer, **THEN CAME EVE**, which somehow missed being added to the disc.

CUMMING SOON! is available on DVD or VHS, exclusively from Trash Palace. The DVD is supposedly a region-free French import, and the videotape is available in NTSC, PAL and SECAM formats. Both are priced at \$19.98. Order with check, money order or VISA/MasterCard from Trash Palace at PO Box 1972, Frederick MD 21702-0972, USA (phone: 301-698-9556; e-mail: brian@trashpalace.com) and tell 'em the Watchdog sent you. —Tim Lucas



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Joan the Maid Under the Palm of the Hand of Pleasure

A NOTE ON TIMINGS

The timings listed for the following tapes reflect only the length of the film itself, and do not include such ephemera as video company logos, FBI warnings, supplementary trailers, or MPAA ratings certificates. The only exceptions to this rule are those films in which the soundtrack is first heard while the distributor's logo is still onscreen.

DESIRE UNDER THE PALMS

1969, *Something Weird Video*, \$20 ppd., 73m 27s, VHS

ODD TRIANGLE

1969, *Something Weird Video*, \$20 ppd., 71m 26s, VHS

THE LAYOUT

1969, *Something Weird Video*, \$20 ppd., 78m 42s, VHS

These three B&W steamers were shot back-to-back, more or less, by veteran NY-based writer/director Joseph W. Sarno during a rare side-trip to Florida. All three films feature basically the same cast, appearing under different names, and would qualify as "soft X"; there are no explicit penetration shots, but some off-camera penetration may have been involved and the women's orgasms were always authentic, according to Sarno. The first two, **DESIRE UNDER THE PALMS** and **ODD TRIANGLE**, were produced by Ken Collins (uncredited) for Raskel Films and the third, **THE LAYOUT**, was produced by J. Arthur Elliott for Desire Productions. Taken together, the films can be viewed as a trilogy-of-sorts about traditionally

repressed, middle-class, American women coming to terms with the seemingly limitless sexual freedom suddenly made available to them in the post-pill 1960s.

DESIRE UNDER THE PALMS (the title, spoofing Tennessee Williams' **DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS**, was imposed on Sarno) attends the crisis of Betty Williams (Ulla Jensen, who looks Italian rather than Swedish), an attractive and voluptuous brunette trapped in an unsatisfying marriage to Walt (Dale Rene), a

KEY

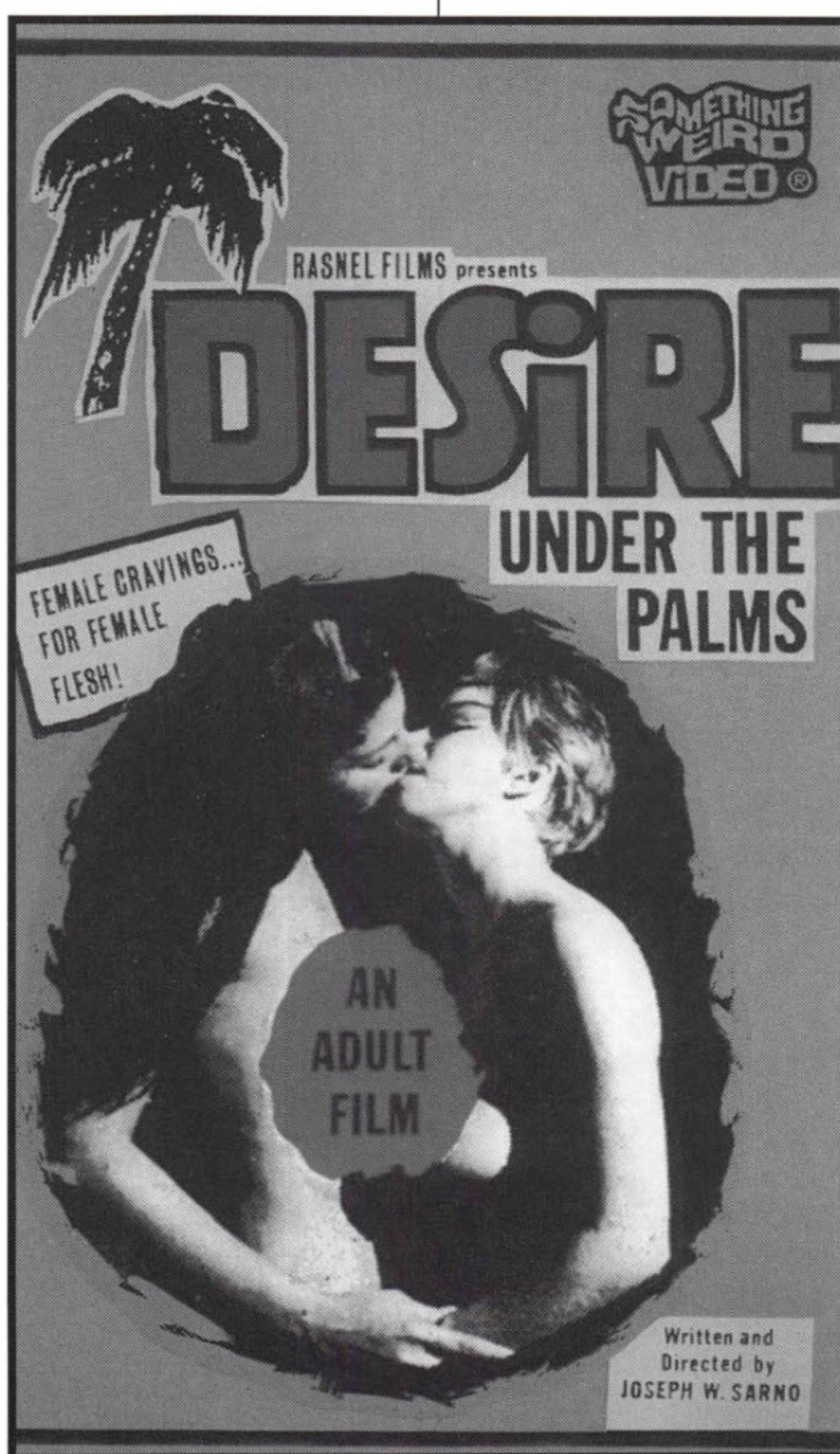
+	Supplements
16:9	WS TV Adaptable
CC	Closed Captioned
D	Digital
DD	Dolby Digital
DTS	Digital Theater Systems (Audio)
DVD-0	No Region Code
DVD-1	USA, Canada
DVD-2	Europe, Japan
HF	Hi-Fi
LB	Letterboxed
MA	Multiple Audio
NSR	No Suggested Retail
OOP	Out of Print
P&S	Pan&Scan
S	Stereo
SS	Surround Sound
ST	Subtitles

hard-working real estate broker who likes to relax in the evenings with a good game of checkers ("I really get lost in checkers"). A magazine writer, Betty is preoccupied with her lack of sexual fulfillment, which is exacerbated by a porn magazine deliberately left on her desk by her adventurous friend Christine; she begins to dream of orgiastic encounters with infernal succubi and a well-muscled, phantasmal man (an uncredited Steve Hawkes, who later starred in various Florida-made Tarzan films and the unforgettable **BLOOD FREAK**) and pours her fantasies into short fiction, where her lack of experience is exposed, causing her agent Stacy and various editors to reject her work as naïve and ridiculous. Christine and a girlfriend recruit Betty into passive participation in a *ménage à quatre*, which is followed by a chance meeting with a young neighborhood girl, Penny, whose sister Doris and brother-in-law Norman are published sex authors whom the girl characterizes as "evil and violent." Norman introduces Betty to oral pleasure and lesbian bubble-baths with his maid, and before you know it, she's asking Penny if she can "observe" her and her boyfriend Ralph (Steve Hawkes again, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Betty's past dream) in the act. Stacy soon notices a strong improvement in the imagery of Betty's writing and they are soon sharing men in her bedroom while Walt works late. To alleviate her guilt over her infidelity, Betty appeals to Penny to have an affair with her husband ("I really get engrossed in checkers," she tells him when they meet), but as fulfilling as her experimentations with Norman are, her interactions with Doris become increasingly violent and unpredictable. The cast also includes Susan Martin, Charlotte

Brody, Lola Perez, Dana Cordier, Orlando Childs and Howard Muniz—all pseudonyms.

Like more of Sarno's films than is commonly acknowledged, **DESIRE UNDER THE PALMS** is ultimately a conservative statement—though radically stated—about the importance (and difficulty) of remaining true to one significant other in a world teeming with temptation. The look of the film (all three are photographed in gleaming B&W by Steven Silverman, Sarno's brother-in-law) is deliberately claustrophobic and inquiring, with tight two-shots and

a preponderance of the trademark Sarno shot that depicts indecisive characters being addressed—or manipulated—by others from behind. The fantasy scenes unfold in stark light before a black backdrop, giving them an "out of body" sensibility, and the bedroom scenes are presented almost clinically, in a slash of light in an otherwise darkened room, without any sexy music to distract the viewer from the reality of the women's aroused breathing and the buzzing/quacking of insistent vibrators. What makes these scenes so gripping is how naked they are



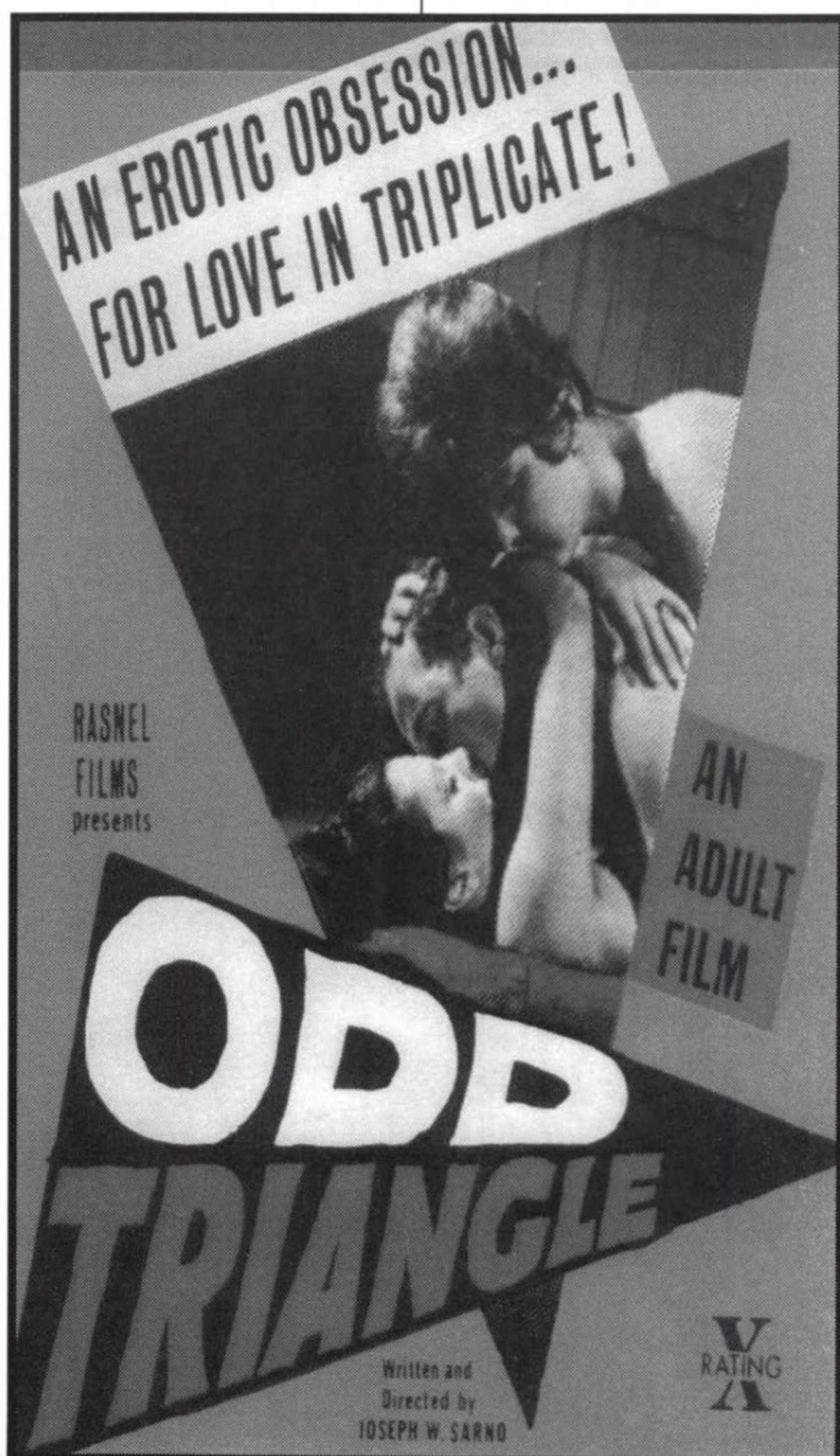
in an emotional sense, how the women (especially Jensen) are experiencing orgasm on camera in a more starkly convincing manner than any one of them can speak the simplest lines of dialogue. The acting is amateurish, but as one eases into the scenario, this ceases to matter because the women follow genuine character arcs and ultimately give us something more authentic than plot.

Something Weird's "Special Edition" cassette is copyrighted 1996, so it has been around for awhile. After a splicy beginning

that causes Betty to jump from her typewriter to her front door in the blink of an eye, the source print stabilizes, more or less, though the sound quality remains a little muddy throughout. Around the 67m point, the words "The 13th Mission" become visible through the image for a short while. Beats us.

ODD TRIANGLE chronicles the search of Allison Harvey (Ulla Jensen, again) for an erotic escape from her suburban malaise. Married to a sexually conservative man who attends only to his own pleasure, and beginning to

seriously consider motherhood as a bandage of distraction, Allison envies the courage of her best friend Janice (**DESIRE**'s Christine), who supplements her husband's shortcomings with a long line of affairs. Sensing her discontent, Allison's married maid (who speaks in double negatives and resembles a pudgy Diane Keaton with a skin problem) tells her about the lover she keeps on the side, who introduced her to "being kissed... down there," and helpfully offers to let Allison watch them in the act sometime. Allison generously allows her employee the occasional use of her bedroom as a daytime place of rendezvous, but declines to watch, instead wandering down the street to visit Janice—whom she catches in the act with a muscular surveyor (Steve Hawkes, credited as "Steve Pipeck"—a play on his real name of Steve Sipek). Shaken, Allison returns home, watches the maid with her lover, and later meets with a newly repentant Janice, who vows an end to her cheating days—till Allison proposes that they pool their resources and rent a houseboat, to minimize their fears of being caught by their mates. To inaugurate their floating *pied-à-terre*, they throw a party with the surveyor, the maid and her lover—one woman too many, but as the maid says, "Honey, that's *never* a problem." They later make the acquaintance of a blank-faced blonde on the dock, Winnie (**DESIRE**'s Doris, in yet another edgy role—"You name it, I've been there," she boasts numbly), who introduces them to nude vibration massage, individually and then together, ultimately serving as a conduit ("Face each other—it's more intense that way") to bring the two friends together in an unanticipated lesbian union.



While potentially interesting in its recapitulation of some favorite Sarno themes—eg., the erotic yearning that propels one to new planes of self-discovery and fulfillment, and how such personal advances can redefine (and sometimes destroy) our relationships—**ODD TRIANGLE** suffers from overly sketchy, hasty writing and generally poor performances. (The actors can often be seen reading their lines off the backs of handy props, à la Marlon Brando, and one of them expresses worry by fiercely pressing her temples, as the beleaguered heroines of several other Sarno films do, and as Sarno himself can be seen doing in the portrait which accompanies his RE/SEARCH: INCREDIBLY STRANGE FILMS interview.) Like **DESIRE UNDER THE PALMS**, **ODD TRIANGLE** is a transitional work that finds Sarno moving beyond the topless titillation that defined this genre only a year or two before, into a more candid and unflinching under-the-sheets exposé of the generation rocked by PLAYBOY and Masters & Johnson. As with **DESIRE**, it is impossible to credit the cast members correctly, aside from “Steve Pipeck”; the onscreen names (Ulla Jensen, Dale Rene, Susan Whitman, Lance Lucas, etc.) are even at odds with those listed in the film’s pressbook (Barbara Lance, Sidney Laird, Blanche Bobbins, Rene Howard, etc.)! Something Weird’s print runs noticeably short of its listed 76m running time, but unlike some other Sarno films in the SWV catalogue that run short, this one appears to be basically complete.

“The J. Arthur Elliott Production of” **THE LAYOUT** (as the main title card proclaims) is somewhat better-heeled than Sarno’s other Florida films, shot at the attractive Miami home of

its producer, who later became the distributor of Mario Bava’s **FOUR TIMES THAT NIGHT** and an executive producer of his **BARON BLOOD** (1972). It stars much the same cast as Sarno’s other two Florida films, though they appear here under different names and with Ulla Jensen demoted to a supporting, though still pivotal, role. Two close friends—Pam (Susan Thomas, **ODD TRIANGLE**’s Janice) and Wendy (Betty Whittman, a waifish brunette not seen in the previous two films)—live together, running a successful interior design business out of their attractively modern (now retro) Florida home. Wendy is having an affair with Robb (“Howard Dale,” the hapless husband of **DESIRE** and **ODD TRIANGLE**), the contractor husband of Pam’s best friend Emmy (Ulla Jensen, credited here as “Barbara Lance”), while workaholic Pam is basically going steady with her vibrator. (The film was made shortly before phallic-shaped vibrators became popular, so this item is more in the manner of a conventional massage device, creatively misapplied.) The delicate balance of their homelife is soon disrupted by the arrival of Pam’s niece Ellen (“Rene Howard,” previously Doris in **DESIRE** and Winnie in **ODD TRIANGLE**) and her roommate Maria (Jeanne Muniz, credited in **DESIRE** as “Lola Perez”). Openly lesbian and quick to skinny-dip in her aunt’s pool, Ellen discerns her aunt’s sexual conservatism at a glance and determines to turn her world upside down. As Ellen and Maria’s nude swimming starts turning up the temperature of the place, Pam has a sentimental conversation with Emmy, reminiscing in their mutual loneliness about how they used to “play Nurse” together, and Emmy ends up indulging Pam

with her vibrator. The figurative walls come tumbling down as Maria’s exhibitionism leads the neglected Emmy into temptation, and eventually, all of the women end up in twin beds together, in every conceivable combination, until Pam and Wendy are brought to a moment in which they are free to explore, without fear, the mutual attraction they have always denied. But beyond that, there remains yet another sexual frontier to be crossed, an extreme for which Pam is unprepared, checkmating her into a position where “there’s nothing left to do—but run.”

Like its companion films, **THE LAYOUT** is raised above the ordinary by its psychological stance and a few scenes of startling erotic intensity. There is also a strong similarity to Pier Paolo Pasolini’s controversial **Teorema** (1968)—which Sarno had not seen, but which was released in America around this time. Here, as in Pasolini’s film, a bourgeois, quietly dysfunctional household is “cured” by the arrival of a visitor who attends to everyone’s silent yearnings and leaves them transformed—except that Emmy is more devil than angel, less a savior figure than a sexual anarchist, a mixer, a *provocateuse*—and the final act suggests that some boundaries, such as incest, are better respected than rescinded. Steven Silverman’s B&W cinematography is modestly stylish in the vein of what Andrew Sarris, while reviewing Sarno’s **SEX IN THE SUBURBS** (1962), once called “suburban expressionism” (an early shot shows Wendy watching Pam undress through the bulbous glass of a brandy snifter). A film like **THE LAYOUT** may be easy to dismiss from the sidelines as a retro-sleaze quickie, but what it says about personal/political dynamics and shows in the sense

of intimate disclosures—between the soap operatic vignettes that exist only to take us from one tryst to the next—is sometimes profound. There is an exploratory ethic, symptomatic of the 1960s, that is more palpably conveyed here than in many now-dated youth culture pictures of the era, as these women ponder the questions of who they are, how to take responsibility for their own happiness, and what to do with sexual freedom once they have achieved it. In Sarno's films—the best and even the worst of them—it is always the sexual side of life that is most real and demands that everyone, actor and audience alike, be most present and alert.

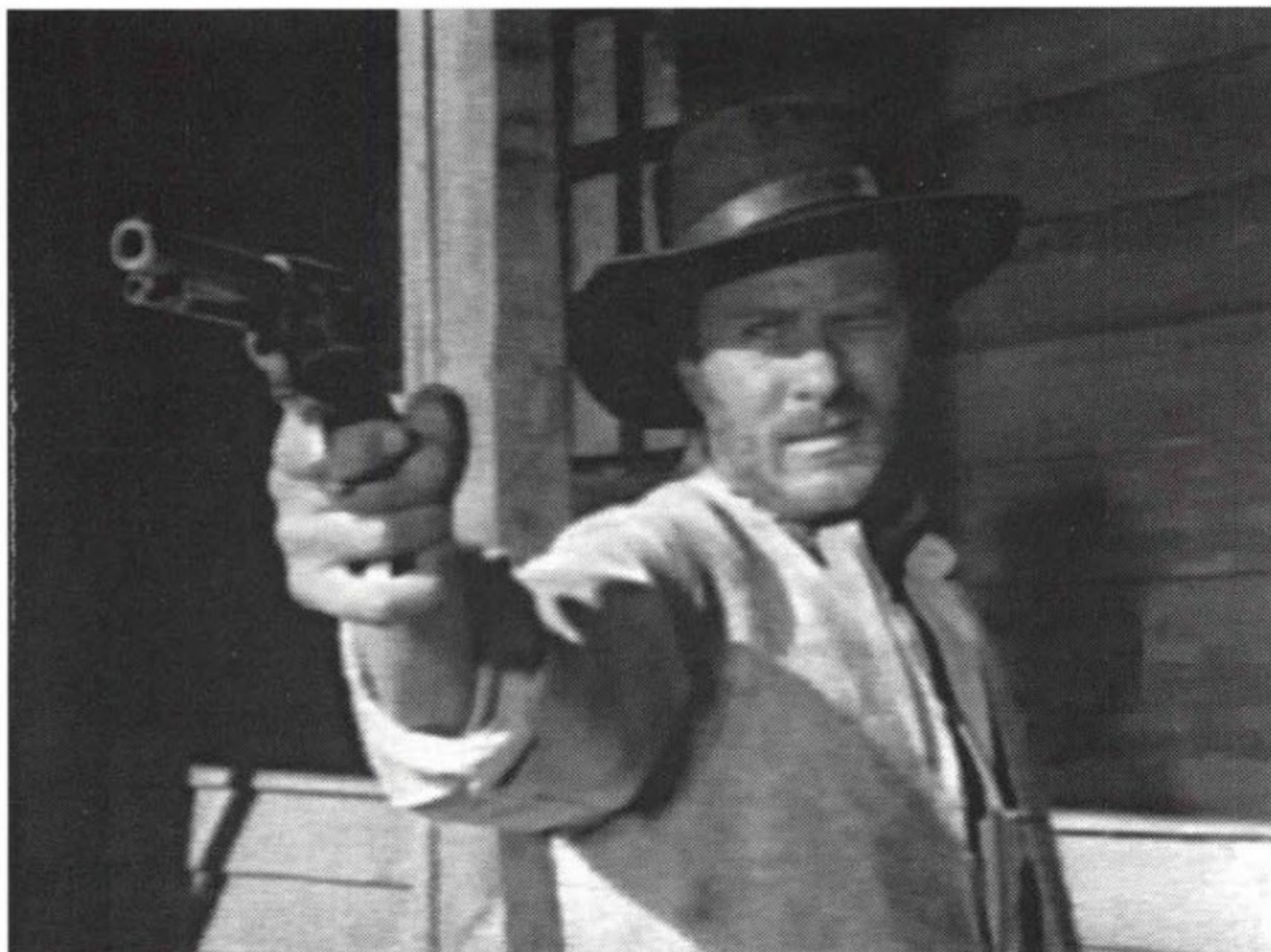
According to Lisa Petrucci's good-humored liner notes, SWV's video master for **THE LAYOUT** is a transfer of the film's original 35mm negative. It looks slightly "noisy" around the edges at times, but it's easily the best-looking of the three, with a sharp, well-detailed, stable image. The mono audio—which, like the other films, features a bubbly keyboard score drawn from uncredited library recordings, is also clearly rendered and generally unimpaired, except for a few momentary drop-outs early on. —Tim Lucas

EL CISCO

aka **CISCO**

1966, *Something Weird Video*, HF, \$20.00 ppd, 96m 56s, VHS

In the five years since using one of his patented exploding cigars to escape from a necktie party, "El Cisco" (William Berger) has established a reputation as the most formidable gunslinger in the area. His signature is a bullet between the eyes and Cisco is eager to make that mark on the two men who almost got him hanged. Teaming up with



William Berger takes aim as the amiable bandito **EL CISCO**.

bandito *jefe* Tuscerora (played, in an offbeat bit of casting, by Taiwanese actor George Wang Kuo), Cisco easily eliminates the first target. The other one on his death list is corrupt businessman Burt Challenge (Tom Felleghy), prompting Cisco to sign on when he learns of Tuscerora's plan to rob Challenge's bank. However, the gunman shows up early, cleans the place out, and leaves nothing for his Mexican partners. After burying the money in an open grave (belonging to *Abraham Lincoln*, no less!), Cisco and his old flame (Antonella Murgia) make up for lost time but the fugitive quickly falls into Challenge's clutches. With the help of the town doctor (Nino Vingelli) and a babbling alcoholic undertaker named "Scratchy," a wounded but still mobile Cisco is able to escape and sets out to finish what he started.

Like a few other Italian productions from early on in the cycle, **EL CISCO** plays like a standard issue American oater, lacking most of what viewers would expect from a Spaghetti Western.

Bruno Nicolai's score delivers the expected flourishes, but writer/director Sergio Bergonzelli (**IN THE FOLDS OF THE FLESH, BLOOD DELIRIUM**) holds back on the genre standards (no imposing close-ups, zooms, flamboyant compositions, or stark violence here) in favor of conventional set-ups and editing, leaving little beyond the ho-hum storyline and sloppily-staged action to hold one's attention. Berger makes a credible hero, but his character lacks the flamboyance and magnetism to carry the movie singlehandedly and, with so little help from the filmmakers, that is practically what is expected of him in this case.

Something Weird's presentation (which carries the company bug in the right hand corner) has some problems but is fairly good overall. The transfer is derived from nice source material and the cropping of the image is generally not a distraction (unlike most Spaghetti Westerns from this period, **EL CISCO** appears to have been shot in 1.85:1, not scope). There are occasional color and contrast shifts, and

two day-for-night sequences look like mid-afternoon here. A persistent hiss can be heard on the soundtrack and the score warbles on occasion, but dialogue remains coherent throughout. Interestingly, the print retains the original *fine primo tempo* card, which indicates the intermission point for Italian screenings of the picture. —John Charles

GHOST WORLD

2001, MGM Home Entertainment, HF/SS/CC, \$9.94, 111m 20s, VHS

For his first fiction feature, documentary director Terry Zwigoff (**CRUMB**) has adapted a non-generic comic book by Daniel Clowes (who collaborates with Zwigoff on the screenplay) and come out with an extremely weird teen movie. So wrapped up with its credible and appealing but also annoying heroine, **GHOST WORLD** is witty, irritating, cool, gauche, embarrassing, magical and monotonous by turns. With its deliberate *non sequiturs* and odd enthusiasms, it doesn't conform to anyone's idea of genre, but it was one of the real surprises of 2001 and is well worth visiting (or revisiting) on video.

Enid (**THE HOLE**'s Thora Birch), a Lulu-haired and bespectacled obsessive, and Rebecca (**THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE**'s Scarlett Johansson), her slightly more conventional best friend, graduate from high school with relief. Enid has to make up a failing grade by taking a summer course in art taught by kook Roberta (Illeana Douglas) while Rebecca heads straight into a coffee shop minion job, still committed to the girls' long-term plan of getting an apartment together. The girls, bubbling over with ideas (not all good and some disastrous), play a cruel joke on Seymour (Steve Buscemi), a record-collecting

loner who has placed a personal ad to connect with a blonde he met in an airport. After luring Seymour to a ghastly mock-'50s diner (Wowsville) for a sham blind date, the girls follow him home. Rebecca is creeped out by Seymour and is content with their usual target of torment, convenience store clerk Josh (**APT PUPIL**'s Brad Renfro), but Enid gets strangely involved with the guy. She drags him on odd adventures like an exploration of a sex shop where she buys a Catwoman cowl that goes oddly with her specs, and devotes herself to the project of getting him a date, which means overcoming his self-contained eccentricities. The last act takes a strange course that undercuts the mostly comic observation of the set-up, with Enid acting in a completely contrary manner and emerging as a more credible, less admirable character. She sets Seymour up with the airport blonde (**HARDWARE**'s Stacey Travis) but, at the first sign that she will be replaced in his life, throws a snit and winds up sleeping with him, whereupon he dumps the woman (a real-estate agent) only to find himself cut out

of Enid's life. After deliberately fomenting a quarrel with Rebecca over the apartment plan, Enid goes home to sob her heart out as if she were the aggrieved party.

It's refreshing for a teen movie to present teenage behavior this complex. Even the art sub-plot takes a strange turn: after Roberta praises some twisted coat-hangers that purportedly make a vague statement about abortion and sneers at Enid's interesting and personal work (sketches actually made by Sophie Crumb), Enid presents as found art a 1920s racist advertisement. She claims this as a statement about the roots of bigotry in America (a half-sincere stand, but still a homework shortcut influenced by Seymour's interest in blues) and Roberta puts her up for a scholarship, but the piece offends the school so much that the offer is withdrawn and she isn't even allowed to pass the class. The development works because Zwigoff sees everyone's point: it's not just a case of a heroic rebel hard done by, since Enid also has moments of real purposeless malice and indecision. The finish is almost fantastical, bringing on a

Thora Birch as Enid, the Gen X everygirl heroine of *GHOST WORLD*, based on the comic by Daniel Clowes.



magical mode of conveyance to allow Enid some form of escape if not maturity.

Birch is extraordinary, plumped up to resemble the graphic novel character, admirably frank but also close to being an 18 year-old sociopath. Johansson is fine in what has become in the adaptation a secondary role (Rebecca has more to do in the comic), but the move away from her character also prevents this from being a girly buddy fantasy. Zwigoff follows the obsessive detailing he examined in **CRUMB** (there are many back-references) with an understanding of Seymour's strange integrity: in a casual barroom conversation with a woman who might like him, he is unable to refrain from delivering a lecture on the difference between blues and ragtime to correct an ignorant remark. There is also a real commitment to American history, suppressed or lost in the transformation of an average town into a "ghost world" dominated by faceless, unauthentic franchise outlets. The many found objects in the film go beyond the mere assembly of kitsch; one flip-through of corporate logos to show how a bland franchise has concealed its racist origins is more pointed than the whole of Spike Lee's labored **BAMBOOZLED**. It has good one-scene cameos (wheel-chair-bound Bruce Glover, who uses the Internet boringly to solve trivia questions to get a free drink, the assembly of Seymour's fellow record collectors who miss the *double entendres* in their talk of "large holes" and "tight cracks") and perfect tiny performances from Bob Balaban (**GOSFORD PARK**) and Teri Garr (**AFTER HOURS**) and Enid's hesitant Dad and peppy girlfriend.

MGM's VHS release is a perfectly acceptable rental alternative to the pricier DVD (DD-5.1/



This TERROR AT ORGY CASTLE's succubus no doubt has unwholesome plans for that twig.

16:9/LB/ST/+, \$24.98) edition, for those wishing to test the waters. The VHS image is unmasked, revealing more image content than the matted DVD version, which is nevertheless preferable for the additional focus it lends to its compositions. The disc offers an anamorphically enhanced 1.85:1 presentation with perfect picture quality (aside from one thrift-shop skirt moiré effect), 16 chapter stops and 5.1 surround sound that highlights the interesting selection of musical cues and the understated delivery of Clowes' amusing throwaways ("This is so bad it's gone past good and back to bad again") from the principles. Optional subtitles are offered in English, French and Spanish. The extras include: four tiny "deleted and alternate" scenes, trailers for the film and soundtrack album, a brief "making of" featurette and a "music video" for "*Jaan Pehechaan Ho*," a lavish Bollywood production number (allegedly by "Ted Lyons & His Cubs") Enid watches under the opening

credits (actually, it's an extract from the 1965 movie **GUMNAAM**). Not quite a hidden feature is another "alternate" take presented at the end of the credits, in which loser Seymour gets payback. —Kim Newman

THE HAND OF PLEASURE

1971, *Something Weird Video*, HF, \$20.00 ppd, 62m 20s, VHS

TERROR AT ORGY CASTLE

1971, *Something Weird Video*, HF, \$20.00 ppd, 63m 1s, VHS

These impoverished L.A. softcore oddities sport no credits but are the work of director Spence Crilly (aka "Zoltan G. Spencer"), producer Mañuel Condé, and the amusingly named Satyr IX Productions. **THE HAND OF PLEASURE** unfolds in London, England and sports so much early '60s stock footage, you wonder at times whether some scheming editor tried to horrify unsuspecting audiences by dropping isolated bits



Superstud William Howard is caught in the evil clutches of Dr. Dreadful in THE HAND OF PLEASURE.

of smut into a G-rated travelogue. CIA agents are having both their secrets and their lifeforce stolen from them ("Another one, Sir—sucked to death!") by the randy women of the titular organization, which is headed up by "the monstrous Dr. Dreadful." Meanwhile, Joe (William Howard), an American student of Chinese culture (Where else but *Britain* would one go to study such a thing?) travels to a local strip club for an evening's relaxation. While he is busy ogling a dancer with breasts the size of a Manchester football pitch, an agent slips Joe some top secret information before meeting his fate at the hands of the girls (who mew like contented pussycats while performing their dastardly deeds). Evidently feeling that it is his patriotic duty, Joe lends a hand to Scotland Yard by acting as a decoy. For some no doubt logical reason, he must team up with Jill, a horny American girl (Terry Johnson) doing "post graduate sex research." This means that she takes notes during sex with Joe and, later, while whipping his

bare buttocks (well, whipping the bed, actually, as the thing clearly never does come into contact with him). A message in a fortune cookie leads the pair to The Museum of Heinous Crimes (where one room and three paltry exhibits constitute a museum), a rather "come and get me" front for Dr. D's secret headquarters. Will the chief inspector arrive in time to save Jill before she is sucked to death and Joe is transformed into a limp-wristed robot?

The "See the Wonders of London" footage eats up a lot of time, but this is an enjoyably ridiculous effort with lots of vigorous but oddly chaste coupling (Joe must be the only superstud around who can perform for hours at a time without the benefit of an erection) on sets that are every bit as undressed as the performers. The best is saved for the end, via a wonderfully silly sequence where our hero defeats Dreadful's henchgirls by screwing them unconscious (the narrator reveals that the women survived the horrifying ordeal and

are now undergoing "rehabilitation" in one of Her Majesty's prisons). The reel changes are ragged and there is light wear the rest of the time, with the occasional disruptive splice. Contrasts are harsh and the sound warbles a bit, but the presentation is acceptable for the age and rarity of the material.

Narration and wall-to-wall sleazy music try to compensate for a lack of synchronized sound in the wonderfully titled **TERROR AT ORGY CASTLE**, a somewhat more unwholesome effort that strays tentatively into roughie territory. For the climax of their European vacation, Americans Bill (William Howard, again) and Lisa decide to make love in a medieval castle. They find a suitable place of assignation through their travel agent, but the castle turns out to be rather dingy and leaves them a bit on edge, particularly when they meet their hostess, Countess Dominova (Holly Woodstar). However, *amore* is soon in the musty air and the couple are barely through the door of their room before it's off with the clothes and on with the carnal calisthenics ("The old stones really turned her on!"). Bill makes the mistake of spying on Dominova (who likes to traipse around the drafty premises wearing nothing but a cape) and sees her transform into a man, before ravishing two willing playmates. As punishment for his curiosity, Bill is ravished by a pair of succubi but retains enough of his vital fluids to survive the encounter. A castle costume party quickly turns gruesome when a naked girl is bound to a cross and a rat in a heated frying pan is placed against her stomach. The creature soon tries to eat its way out, with predictably bloody results. This is the limit for Bill and Lisa, who decide to beat a hasty retreat, but "the rat business had worked up the



Sandrine Bonnaire, readied for execution, in Jacques Rivette's epic of religious persecution and martyrism, *JOAN THE MAID*.

bloodlust of the other guests," and a sexual Black Mass is next on the agenda, with the Americans as guests of honor.

There is a fair amount of amusement to be had here (particularly via the clichéd, downbeat ending) but **TERROR AT ORGY CASTLE** does little of interest with its horror angle, save for the rat sequence (which turns out to be a trick), and the picture occasionally drifts into dullness. That said, the premise and intermittently wacky execution make the picture of moderate interest to softcore completists. **TERROR** was lensed at Ray Dorn's Hollywood Stages utilizing castle interiors that previously turned up in Al Adamson's **BLOOD OF DRACULA'S CASTLE** and David L. Hewitt's **GALLERY OF HORRORS**. While not much more convincing than the principal set in *THE HILARIOUS HOUSE OF FRIGHTENSTEIN*, they are comparatively lavish for a porn quickie.

The SWV website listing states that **TERROR AT ORGY CASTLE** is derived from the 35mm negative and it indeed looks much cleaner than **THE HAND OF PLEASURE**. Colors are rather pale but the transfer is otherwise passable and the sound is okay. The SWV bug appears in the right hand corner of each feature, but you will likely be too distracted by other protruding objects to notice! —John Charles

JOAN THE MAID

Jeanne la Pucelle

Part 1: *Les Batailles*

"The Battles"

Part 2: *Der Verrat*

"The Prisons"

1994, Facets Video, HF/S/LB/ST, \$79.95, 254m 5s, VHS

This two-tape set of Jacques Rivette's **JOAN THE MAID** compiles a hefty version (4 hours and 15m) of the life of one of France's most cherished religious and

historical figures, Jeanne d'Arc. The familiar if compelling story is about a peasant girl who is driven by her deep-seated belief that she is destined by divine will to deliver France from the hands of the English. With each part roughly two hours long, Rivette's version of the story is organized around the two broad dramatic events indicated above, each part allotted one tape.

Part 1 ("The Battles") introduces Joan (**VAGABOND**'s Sandrine Bonnaire) shortly after her calling at age 13, her meeting with Robert de Baudricourt (Baptiste Roussillon, whom she persuades to escort her to Vaucouleurs to meet the Dauphin of France, played by André Marcon), and concludes with her military victory over the English at Orleans. Part 2 ("The Prisons") begins with Joan and the Dauphin in a series of military victories, moves to her eventual capture, the

King's demobilization of Joan's army, her eventual betrayal to the English, and her subsequent trial for heresy in 1431. In the all-too-familiar story, Joan is accused of various heretical acts including, falsely, witchcraft. She is eventually condemned as a heretic and burned at the stake, at roughly the age of 19.

Rivette's interpretation of the Jeanne d'Arc story focuses on character rather than spectacle, and seeks historical accuracy rather than epic sweep; Joan is portrayed as a diminutive, elfin virgin armed only with her deep faith. We reviewed Rivette's fine 1966 film **THE NUN** [VW 75:19], with which **JOAN THE MAID** shows certain thematic similarities, most notably the exploration of earlier historical periods in which women were sexually repressed by a rigid social order, and the heroism of an individual who clashes with and rises above the persecution imposed by an outside authority. Both films also explore an oppressive religious hierarchy—the Roman Catholic Church—and the corruption within it. In short, both women are martyrs, the one (Jean) a famous icon, the other (the Nun) obscure, even though her story, too, is based on actual events.

A source of confusion is that Part 2 uses a German print source (titled "*Der Verrat*" rather than "*Les Prisons*"), while for Part 1, a French print source was used. Happily, the transfers are nonetheless excellent. Letterboxed at 1.58:1 from its original 1.66:1, the transfer, taken from pristine positive print sources, is defined and colorful, the autumnal colors of cinematographer Pierre Lubtchansky rich and evocative, capturing the set design's meticulous period reconstruction of the Middle Ages. The two-channel mono audio is likewise fine, if undistinguished. The two parts of **JOAN**

THE MAID are also available separately on VHS, rather heftily priced at \$49.95 each.

By pricing it at \$10 less than half the cost of the film on tape, Facets is openly encouraging the acquisition of their two-disc DVD presentation (DD-2.0/LB/ST/+, \$39.95). The set supplements the two films with filmographies of Sandrine Bonnaire (who gives a heartfelt performance) and Jacques Rivette, as well as an informative essay about Rivette and the French New Wave. Also included is a short history of Joan of Arc in the cinema. Reporting that by the end of World War I Joan's story had been told "at least half a dozen times," Cecil B. DeMille's early silent **JOAN THE WOMAN** (1916)—currently available on VHS from Kino on Video—is cited as the first version of the story made with an epic sweep ("a cast of thousands") prior to Joan's canonization in 1920. The latest interpretation of her story is Luc Besson's strange, slightly hysterical **THE MESSENGER** (1999) that starred former model (and Besson's now ex-wife) Milla Jovovich, badly miscast as Joan. In addition, the discs include a valuable and scrupulously detailed historical timeline, including actual quotations from Joan's posthumous 1455 trial of rehabilitation, from which Carl Theodor Dreyer drew heavily for his masterful silent **THE PASSION OF JOAN OF ARC** [*La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, 1928], which starred Renée Falconetti in a sublime performance as Joan (currently a Criterion Collection title, \$29.98). A combined 23 chapter stops have been provided (11 on the first disc and 12 on the second), skimpy for a film of this scale. The packaging incorrectly lists the year of release as 1997. —Rebecca & Sam Umland

THE STEAMROLLER AND THE VIOLIN

Katok i skripka

1960, Facets Video, HF/ST/+, \$24.95, 43m 28s, VHS

Recently discovered in the Mosfilm Studios archives, **THE STEAMROLLER AND THE VIOLIN** was late Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky's (**SOLARIS**, **STALKER**) diploma film for the State Cinema Institute in Moscow (VGIK). The VGIK had accepted the then 22 year-old Tarkovsky as a student in 1954, where he would study cinema for the next six years, completing this film, in effect his directorial debut, in 1960.

Reflecting the popularity of children's films in the early 1960s Soviet Union, **THE STEAMROLLER AND THE VIOLIN** is about a fatherless little boy, Sasha (Igor Fomchenko), who is taunted by neighborhood bullies because he takes violin lessons. One day, while fleeing his tormentors, Sasha meets a friendly construction worker, Sergei (V. Zamansky), operator of a red steamroller. Sergei befriends Sasha, teaching him how to operate the steamroller in exchange for Sasha playing the violin for him. Sergei becomes a kind of surrogate father for Sasha, who soon begs Sergei to take him to the cinema to see a popular film. The boy's mother, however, forbids him to leave his home to attend the movie. After a waiting in vain for the boy to arrive at the appointed rendezvous sight, Sergei escorts a lady friend of his to the movie instead.

As would seem appropriate to Communist ideology, the film celebrates the value and dignity of common labor. Yet the laborer Sergei also has an aesthetic sense, as shown by his request to have the boy play the violin for him, and his encouraging the



Igor Fomchenko and V. Zamansky form a poignant relationship in THE STEAMROLLER AND THE VIOLIN, the recently discovered graduate film of Andrei Tarkovsky.

boy to take pride in his talent. In this sense, the film is a warm, engaging if slightly sentimental exploration of two unlike individuals who manage to transcend their differences—both in age and in background—to form a bond of respect and friendship. The film anticipates many of the characteristics of Tarkovsky's later films: a strong interest in the image (despite the fact that it may serve no narrative function), as well as an elliptical narrative style featuring both poetic crosscutting as well as apparently unmotivated digressions. In addition, the direction of the child actor is exceptional.

Facets' source is a positive print in extremely good condition, considering its age and archival neglect. Despite occasional speckling and a scratch now and then, the picture is unflawed and the color cinematography by Vadim Yusov (who would remain Tarkovsky's cinematographer through the next several pictures) remains warm and colorful. The soundtrack is also quite acceptable, if

without much depth, though this is to be expected of a film of this origin and age. The English subtitles, we are pleased to say, are quite easy to read.

Facets Video have also released this title on DVD, with a DD-1.0 soundtrack, 10 chapter marks, and some supplemental text features, including an extremely detailed and well-written Tarkovsky biography spread over several screens (in which is suggested the strong parallels between Tarkovsky's boyhood and that of Sasha in this film) and a comprehensive filmography, including films on which he assisted while at the VGIK. —Rebecca & Sam Umland

THE YOUNG EROTIC FANNY HILL

1970, *Something Weird Video*, \$20 ppd., 70m 4s, VHS

The title portends bright, ebullient, continental spice, but this may well be Joe Sarno's ugliest, scuzziest picture, a bare-bones, mattress-on-the-floor

affair burdened with a mostly unattractive cast. Lenore (a pudgy, short brunette whose legs show traces of eczema) shares a New York apartment with her friends, Ann (a mannish, careworn, 30ish woman with prominent underarm hair) and Joan (an attractive, willowy brunette whose slim, yoga-toned body is marred by a long scar along the side of her ribs). When Joan invites her co-worker Tom back to her room, the third wheels eavesdrop on their friend's lovemaking and become aroused. Ann and Lenore have a chance encounter with Fanny Hill, a sex therapist (whose caked-on makeup doesn't begin to hide the herpes sores encircling her mouth), whom Lenore knew in her teen years on Long Island. Ann becomes very drawn to her ("her eyes... the way they bore into someone..."), causing Lenore's jealousy to flare. Fanny was her first love—the person responsible for introducing her to the erotic uses of fruit ("It's like a mouth, a wet mouth," she says while applying a bitten peach to her labia)—and she is neither over her, nor has she forgiven her for running away from her home, and their relationship, without warning. After Ann succumbs to a \$10 sampling of Fanny's "therapy," Lenore pleads with her ex-lover to leave her "suggestible" friend alone. Fanny refuses, offering Lenore a free session "for old times' sake," which she reluctantly accepts. Sexually healed, Ann brings a new lover, Artie (a Robert Blake type, who doesn't take the gum out of his mouth when he's making love), back to the apartment. He soon seduces all three of the girls ("I got moves that make women drip right down their leg!" he boasts) and persuades them to participate in a nude photography scheme he's masterminded, for which he also

recruits his lesbian cousin, Chris. As if lured there by the sheer musk emanating from the apartment, an old schoolmate of Lenore's—a strangely feral girl named Ronnie Archer—shows up, offering to “do anything” in exchange for a place to stay. She and Joan become almost violently attracted, and after consummating their lust, they run away together. Then Chris and Arnie disappear, leaving Lenore and Fanny alone together to confront the demons of their erotic past.

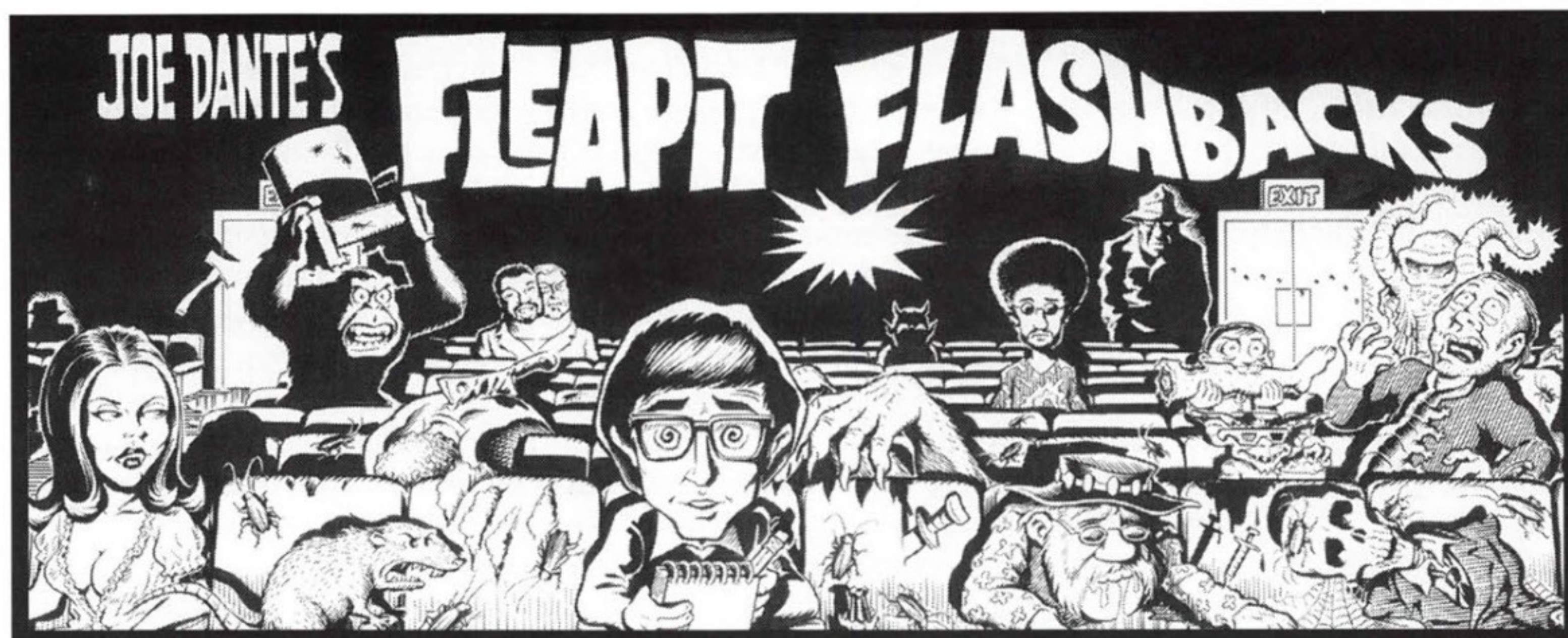
The sets are minimal, some equipped with a bare mattress and others with even less: a

simple black velvet backdrop that projects the cast into some kind of inner space abstraction. No one, not even the guests, is ever shown entering the apartment through a door, and the music “score” consists of a single snare drum being tapped by someone who can barely keep time. The sound is also badly recorded, making amplification essential but still not completely satisfying, since the last 20m or so are plagued by an incessant hum. The din of New York City traffic is constantly ruining takes which were kept anyway, for authenticity's sake or, more likely, out of simple economic

necessity. The beach scenes are extremely welcome, not only because they add production value to the picture and expand its narrow visual horizons, but because they are mostly staged in the past and provide a psychological anchor that pegs this film, even *sans* credits, as a Sarno picture. Despite a large number of multi-partner sex scenes and combinations involving men, women, food and vibrators, which tease the boundaries of hardcore, the most memorable scene is the most chaste, as an uncontrollable sexual tension builds during the meeting of Joan and Ronnie, at a nude modelling session. Sarno stretches the scene of traded gazes to the breaking point, priming the viewer for a white-hot payoff. (I asked Sarno about this scene and he laughed, “Oh, they were using *real ammunition* in that scene, let me tell you!”) Unfortunately, when the two women finally get together, they fail to make the expected connection on-camera; their awkward encounter is a rare instance of an obviously faked session in a Sarno film of this era.

This is an extremely rare film that is lucky to have survived at all, but *Something Weird's* tape was mastered from a 35mm positive print that looks like it was used to shine and scrape the shoes of every bum in the Bowery. There are no credits, the color has turned mostly to red, and there are heavy scratches throughout the splicy print, which runs 10m shorter than its listed running time. Ultimately worth seeing by anyone interested in Sarno's work, but more interesting than satisfying—and given this incomplete presentation, you'll need to be very forgiving as you connect the dots. —Tim Lucas





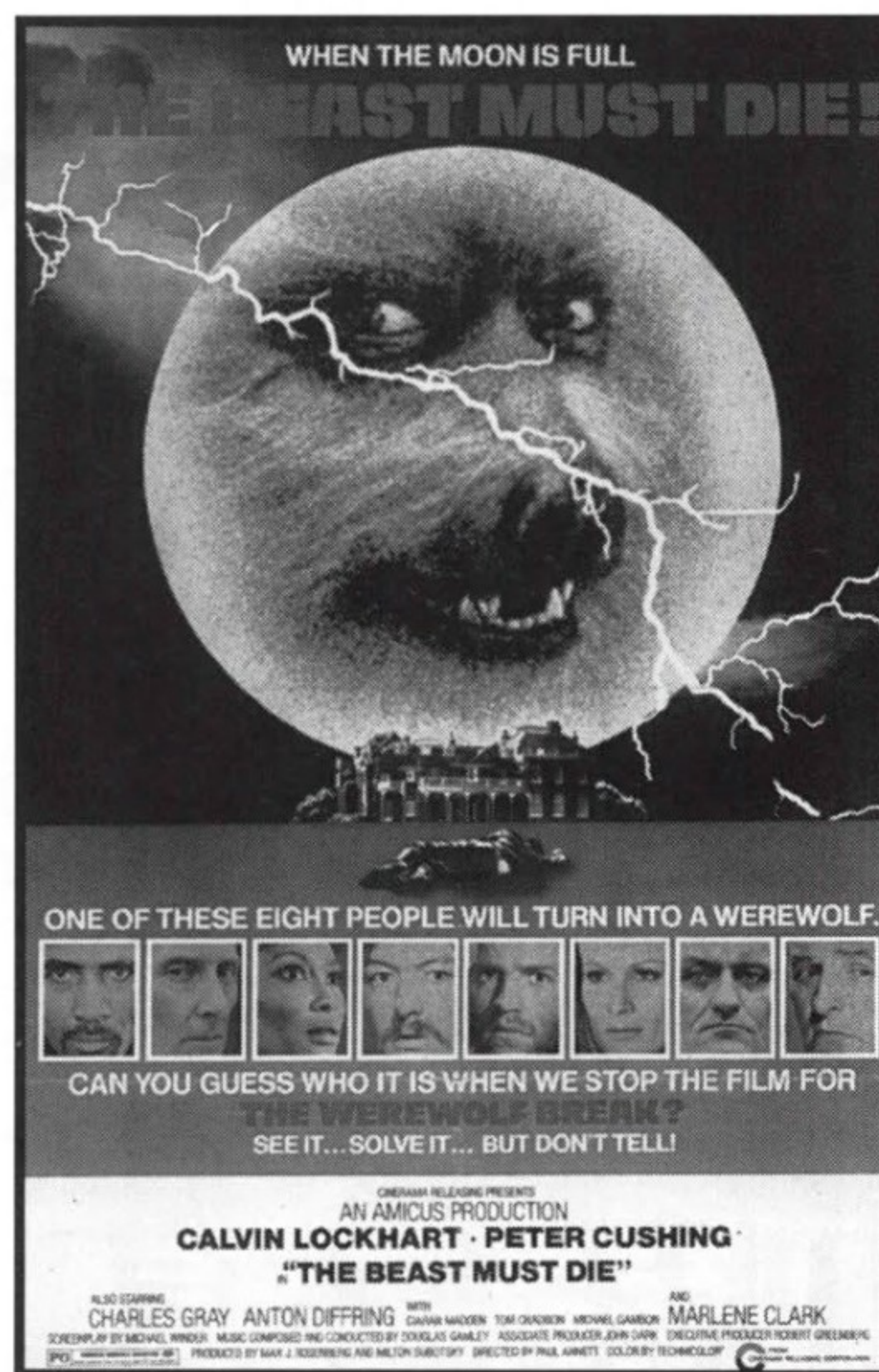
The Film Bulletin Reviews, 1969-1974

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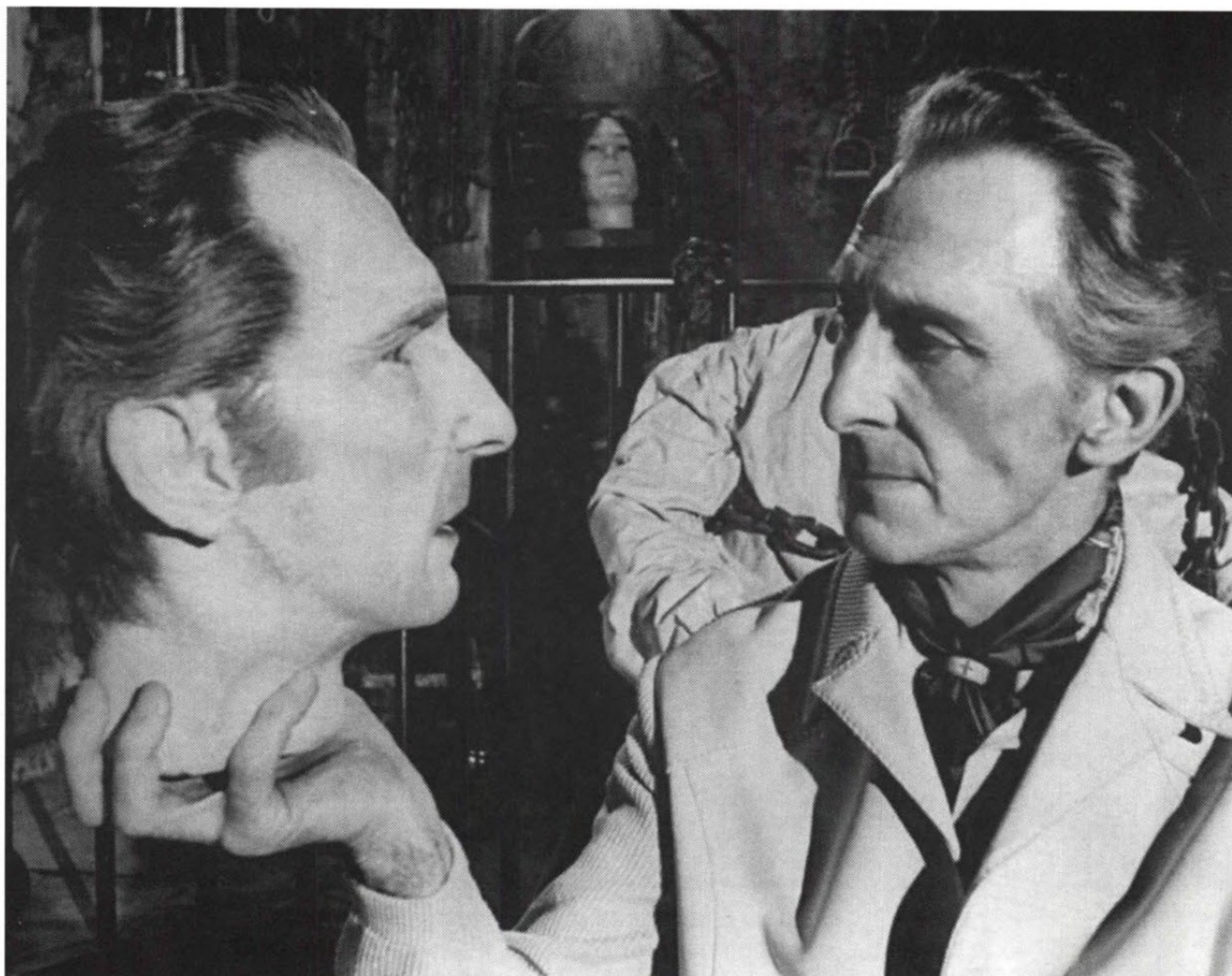
THE BEAST MUST DIE

Which one is the werewolf? Finding the answer makes a neat gimmick, smart promotion of which should make this otherwise tame British import a strong contender in ballyhoo markets. Rating: PG.

This British horror mystery has a good audience-participation gimmick going for it: a "Werewolf Break," during which the story stops to allow viewers to shout out the name of whichever suspicious character they think is the werewolf that's been wiping out other cast members. Reminiscent of the sort of surefire gimmickry that William Castle specialized in during the early '60s, this bit is being shrewdly promoted by the always showmanship-minded Cinerama Releasing, and should boost **THE BEAST MUST DIE** to good grosses in fast saturation playoff. The film itself, based on a story by sci-fi writer James Blish, is slightly offbeat, but too tame to succeed as a chill-inducer. Michael Winder's screenplay (a sort of hirsute variation on the old *TEN LITTLE INDIANS* plot) is occasionally rather inventive, but debuting director Paul Annett is unable to exercise the control necessary to make it work. Particularly disappointing are the werewolf sequences, involving what looks like a big hairy dog photographed from all the least effective angles. An added and fatal irritant is an absolutely awful performance by star Calvin Lockhart as a black playboy who holds the other suspect principals prisoner on his estate so he can have the ultimate thrill of shooting a werewolf. Spying on his houseguests—all reasonably personable types—with a network of TV cameras, Lockhart browbeats,



intimidates and insults them all to the point that by the end our sympathies are pretty firmly on the side of the werewolf, whoever he is. Among the possible lycanthropes are Peter Cushing, Anton Diffring, Charles Gray, Marlene Clark and a beautiful newcomer named Ciaran Madden. Performances are uneven, as is Jack Hildyard's cinematography. Douglas Gamley's music score lacks punch.



*Peter Cushing loses his head in a wax museum near **THE HOUSE THAT DRIPPED BLOOD**.*

1974. Cinerama Releasing (Amicus Productions). Technicolor. 90 minutes. Calvin Lockhart, Peter Cushing. Produced by Max J. Rosenberg and Milton Subotsky. Directed by Paul Annett.

Initially issued by Impulse Video as **BLACK WEREWOLF**, **THE BEAST MUST DIE** is currently available on VHS and DVD from Image Entertainment.

THE HOUSE THAT DRIPPED BLOOD

Four horror tales centering on haunted house. Well made and acted, an exploitable entry for general dualler markets, but rather mild for more bloodthirsty horror audience. Could have had class potential except for the title. OK boxoffice future overall. Rating: GP.

Its sanguine title notwithstanding, **THE HOUSE THAT DRIPPED BLOOD** aims at quiet chills rather than boisterous thrills, taking the form of four horror stories of varying quality centering on an accursed country house.

Production, direction and acting are of a high standard, although the stories written by **PSYCHO**'s Robert Bloch lack the sensational aspects to wholly satisfy the present blood-and-guts horror market. In fact, were it not for the title, this could be a fairly good prospect for better-class audiences, since its horrors are on a somewhat higher **DEAD OF NIGHT** level than might be expected. The British-made Cinerama release is nevertheless quite exploitable, with cast presence of horror vets Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing a plus for any type of audience. Director Peter Duffell helms the proceedings intelligently, but the film lacks the force and charm of **TORTURE GARDEN**, a 1968 omnibus chiller from the same writer and producers (Amicus Productions). The stories are told to detective John Bennett, investigating the disappearance of the house's last tenant. In the first, horror writer Denholm Elliott is terrified by apparitions of a mad strangler from one



*Ingrid Pitt rises from her coffin to put the bite on Jon Pertwee in this memorable scene from **THE HOUSE THAT DRIPPED BLOOD**.*

of his own novels. The grinning killer's appearances get pretty scary until, alas, it all turns out to be a plot to drive Elliott insane—always a bit of a cheat, and no less so here. Next, lonely retired broker Peter Cushing becomes fascinated by a wax figure of Salome which resembles his lost love. Eventually his own head ends up on Salome's platter, severed and covered with wax by the museum proprietor. Drawn out and full of loose ends, it's the weakest story despite Cushing's excellent performance, and it doesn't even take place in the house. The best story has Christopher Lee as the strict father of angelic 8 year-old Chloe Franks, whom he considers supernaturally evil. Governess Nyree Dawn Porter soon discovers the child is a witch and like her late mother, is given to torturing her father by voodoo. Strongly played and intriguingly plotted, it ends with the child throwing a wax doll of Lee into the fireplace to the accompaniment of offscreen agony. The last one is a neat comedy spoof with Jon Pertwee as a horror actor who yearns for the good old days of **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA** and **DRACULA**

("the one with Bela Lugosi, not this new fellow"). Whenever he dons the vampire cape he bought from a strange old man, he turns into a real vampire. This causes problems on the set—he's invisible in his make-up mirror and bites leading lady Ingrid Pitt in the midst of filming. At midnight he even flies off the ground like a bat. He's finally done in by Miss Pitt, a vampire herself, who explains, "we loved your movies so much we just had to make you one of us!" A few well-deserved digs at Amicus' chief competitor, Hammer Films, are also in evidence. Detective Bennett is vampirized at the end by Pertwee and Miss Pitt while searching the house, and the real estate agent notifies the audience that it's open for new tenants.

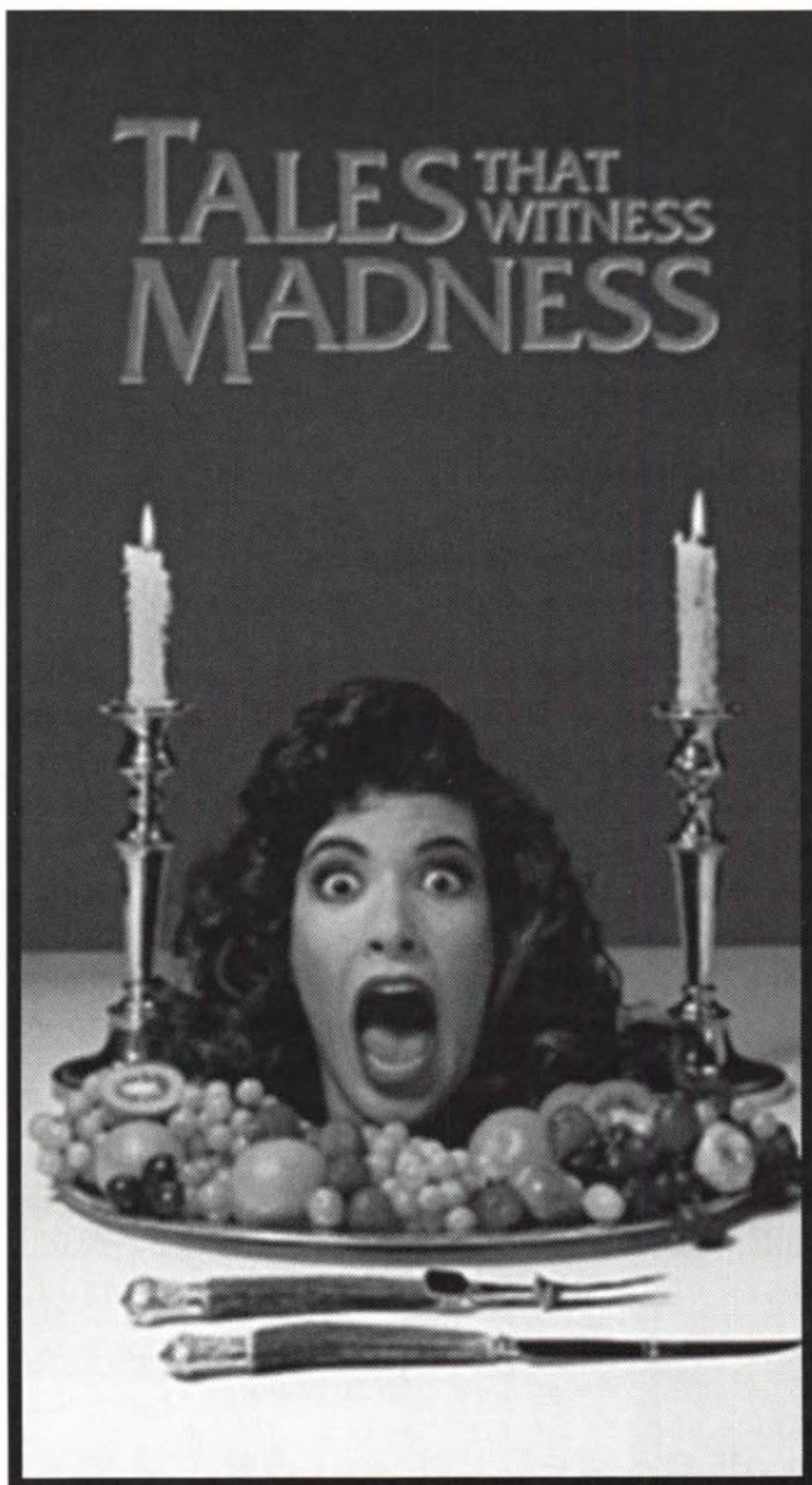
1971. Cinerama (An Amicus Production). Eastman Color. 97 minutes. Christopher Lee, Peter Cushing. Produced by Max J. Rosenberg and Milton Subotsky. Directed by Peter Duffell.

Long overdue for resurrection on DVD (as is **TORTURE GARDEN!**), **THE HOUSE THAT DRIPPED BLOOD** is currently out of print of domestic video, the only previous release being a VHS on the Prism Home Entertainment label.

TALES THAT WITNESS MADNESS


Fairish collection of mini-chillers has Kim Novak and class cast for marquee plus routine horror angles. Title may prove a hindrance, otherwise a passable ballyhoo entry. Rating: R.

Multiple-story horror films have met with some commercial success recently but few, if any, have amounted to much as movies. The plots usually rely entirely on gimmicky "kickers" at the end, and by now, the supply of possible twist endings seems to be depleted. As a result the stories often seem maddeningly predicable. Such is the problem with **TALES THAT WITNESS MADNESS**, a four-story British effort that appears headed for just fair boxoffice response in saturation ballyhoo



markets, despite a classy cast topling the long-absent Kim Novak. The Paramount release also suffers from an obfuscating title. Freddie Francis' direction is occasionally helpful but more often flat and the tales scripted by Jay Fairbank are simply varying degrees of trite. The framing story is a senseless variation on the one in **ASYLUM**. Doctor Donald Pleasance shows Jack Hawkins four patients in his looney bin and tells their case histories. Moppet Russell Lewis invented an imaginary tiger which ate up his nasty parents Georgia Brown and Donald Houston. Peter McEnery was transported to the turn of the century by the baleful powers of an old portrait which then killed his girlfriend Suzy Kendall. McEnery burned the picture, thereby scarring his own face. Annoyed by wife Joan Collins' self-absorption, Michael Jayston transferred his affections to a sensuous-looking tree. When Miss Collins tried to hack it into kindling, Jayston chopped her up instead and took the tree to bed. Horny literary agent Kim Novak wine and dined Polynesian author Michael Petrovitch, unaware he was planning to make a virgin sacrifice of her daughter Mary Tamm. Petrovitch carved up the sweet young thing and she ended up on Kim's dinner plate at a gala luau. Hawkins surmises from all this that Pleasance is bonkers and men in white coats take him away. But Hawkins is soon pounced on by the kid's "imaginary" tiger, so it was all too real, don't you see? Miss Novak, in a middle-aged matron role originally intended for Rita Hayworth, is starting to look like Shelley Winters. Hawkins, who died before he could loop his own performance, is sadly marred by a poorly-dubbed voice, but the other performers provide moderate amusement in roles that hardly taxed their talents. There is some very brief nudity and the gore is more often implied than shown.

1973. Paramount (World Film Services) Movielab Color. 89 minutes. Kim Novak, Georgia Brown, Joan Collins, Jack Hawkins, Donald Houston, Michael Jayston, Suzy Kendall, Peter McEnery, Donald Pleasance. Produced by Norman Priggen. Directed by Freddie Francis.

Though attributed to World Film Services, **TALES THAT WITNESS MADNESS** was reportedly an unofficial Amicus production, co-produced by Milton Subotsky. Its screenwriter, Jay Fairbank, was a nom de plume for former actress Jennifer Jayne, who had played Donald Sutherland's French vampire wife in Amicus' first horror anthology, **DR. TERROR'S HOUSE OF HORRORS** (1965). **TALES...** is currently available as a budget-priced VHS from Paramount Home Video. 



The Giallo Collection



Investigated by Richard Harland Smith

THE GIALLO COLLECTION:

1971-1978, Anchor Bay Entertainment,
DD-2.0/16:9/LB/+, \$59.98, 394m, DVD-0

SHORT NIGHT OF GLASS DOLLS

La corta notte delle bambole di vetro
aka **Malastrana**, **CATALEPSIS**
1971, Anchor Bay Entertainment,
DD-2.0/16:9/LB/+, \$19.98, 96m 38s, DVD-0

THE CASE OF THE BLOODY IRIS

*Perché quelle strane gocce di sangue
sul corpo di Jennifer?*

"What Are Those Strange Drops of Blood
on Jennifer's Body?"

aka **EROTIC BLUE**

1972, Anchor Bay Entertainment,
DD-2.0/16:9/LB/+, NSR, 94m 45s, DVD-0

WHO SAW HER DIE?

Chi l'ha vista morire

aka **THE CHILD**

1972, Anchor Bay Entertainment,
DD-2.0/16:9/LB/+, \$19.98, 94m 16s, DVD-0

THE BLOODSTAINED SHADOW

Solamente nero

"Only Darkness"

1978, Anchor Bay Entertainment,
DD-2.0/16:9/LB/+, \$19.98, 108m 45s, DVD-0

The *gialli* are coming, the *gialli* are coming!

The fleet of Italian psycho-thrillers ignited by Mario Bava's **BLOOD AND BLACK LACE** [*Sei donne per l'assassino*, 1964] and propelled into overdrive by the success of Dario Argento's **THE BIRD WITH THE CRYSTAL PLUMAGE** [*L'uccello dal piume di cristallo*, 1969] has, until now, received spotty attention in the DVD marketplace. Although Bava and Argento are well-represented (each with a signature series from Image Entertainment and Anchor Bay, respectively), the films that followed remain—some twenty years after their appearance on videotape—largely unavailable on DVD. (The notable exceptions being ABE's discs of Sergio Martino's **TORSO**, Armando

*What are those strange petals of flowers
on the body of Edwige Fenech? Find out
in THE CASE OF THE BLOODY IRIS.*

Crispino's **AUTOPSY**, and Lucio Fulci's **DON'T TORTURE THE DUCKLING**.) But now things are changing with the digital debuts of several key entries in the subgenre, from companies such as Shriek Show, VCI Entertainment and this four-pack from Anchor Bay.

While the titles included in ABE's "The Giallo Collection" have been obtainable (and, in some cases, even complete) on the grey market, the company does not boast idly of the rarity of these pristine, uncut, anamorphic transfers. The stylish, innovative execution of the average *giallo* was as integral to its content as were its screenplay and musical score; with the critical reputations of many *gialli* reliant for too long on fuzzy, washed out, nth generation video dupes, the "Giallo Collection" will no doubt prove an eye-opener to both the neophyte and the aficionado.

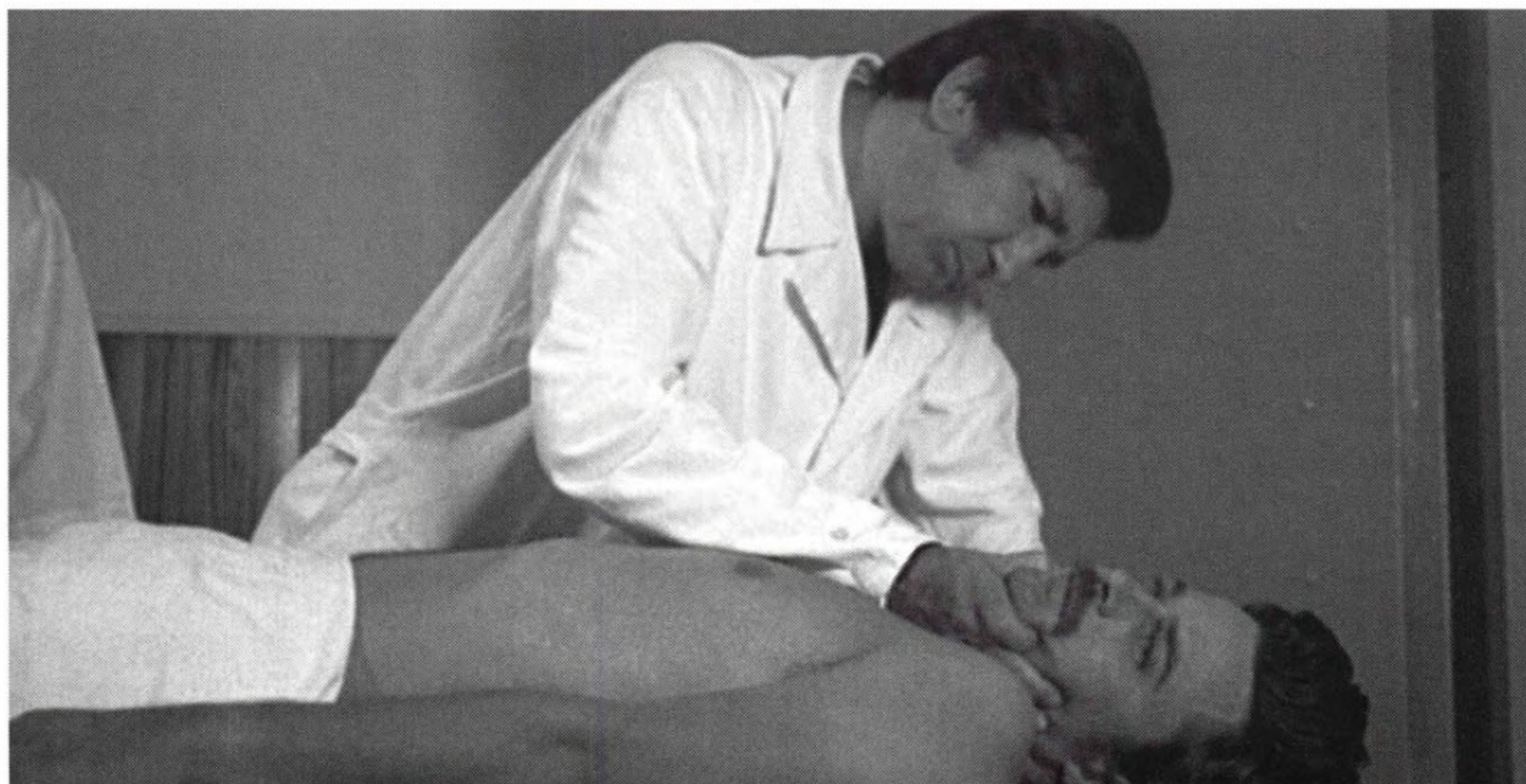
The earliest film in this collection is the most progressive, a consideration nudging it beyond the classification of true *giallo*. **SHORT NIGHT OF GLASS DOLLS** [*La corta notte delle bambole di vetro*, 1971] anticipates such paranoid thrillers as Alan J. Pakula's **THE PARALLAX VIEW** (1974) and George Sluizer's **THE VANISHING** [*Spoorloos*, 1988] with its tale of a decent but untested man forced to exceed his limitations to learn the whereabouts of a lover gone missing. In Prague, American journalist Gregory Moore (French actor Jean Sorel) is preparing to quit the Communist bloc country for the security of London. When Moore announces to colleagues Jack

(Mario Adorf) and Jessica (Ingrid Thulin) his plan to smuggle out of the country his Czech girlfriend Myra (future Bond girl Barbara Bach), Jessica cannot hide her jealousy. After showing Myra off at a *fête* thrown by Minister of the Interior Valinski (José Quaglio), Moore is called away with a scoop regarding a political suicide. Finding the lead bogus, Moore returns home to discover Myra missing. Pressured by Jessica and Valinski to believe that Myra has left him for another man, Moore annoys police commissioner Kirkov (Piero Vida) when his investigation focuses on the shadowy 99 Club, which is connected not only to Myra's disappearance, but to the abduction of several young women throughout Prague.

As if this tale of dread and uncertainty in a strange place were not sufficiently tense, writer-director Aldo Lado adds the framing device of a comatose Moore being trundled into the morgue, where Luciano Catenacci—**KILL, BABY... KILL!**'s "Max Lawrence"—plays a blasé attendant. Outwardly lifeless but all too aware of his surroundings, Moore struggles to signal the medics prepping him for autopsy and maintains his sanity by recalling the facts of the last several days ("I'm Greg, Gregory Moore—that I know... What else?"). However indebted to **SUNSET BLVD.** (or the "Breakdown" episode of **ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS**), the device works to both ratchet up the anxiety of the central mystery (which treads on Edgar Wallace territory, both the original novels and their adaptation as West German *krimis*)

Jean Sorel is a body in the morgue.

But is there still time for him to solve the mystery of SHORT NIGHT OF GLASS DOLLS?



and to telegraph its subtheme of the institutionalized sacrifice of youth to the ancient powers-that-be. Lado shot his film only three years after the Prague Spring of 1968, when Soviet troops rolled into Czechoslovakia; his doubts about the country's future are expressed in Myra's gift to Gregory of mounted butterflies remarkable for lacking, in life, the instinct to fly. In its climax, the film veers towards full-blown horror, with echoes of Roman Polanski's **ROSEMARY'S BABY** (also of John Frankenheimer's **SECONDS**) that anticipates the queasy coda of Francisco Barilli's **THE PERFUME OF THE LADY IN BLACK** [*Il profumo della signora in negro*, 1974].

This Kafkaesque thriller marked Aldo Lado's directorial debut, fresh from assisting Bernardo Bertolucci on **THE CONFORMIST** [*Il conformista*, 1971]. Employing Pasolini's cinematographer Giuseppe Ruzzolini, Lado accentuates the baroque blandishments of his Eastern bloc setting with the luster of gilt fixtures, wine-colored draperies and exotic flowers offered in contrast to the bloodlessness and invisibility of the agents of control. **SHORT NIGHT OF GLASS DOLLS** is easily the most beautiful-looking film in this collection and has been lovingly rendered on this letterboxed (2.31:1) disc. The transfer is sharp, the colors surpassingly vivid (playing a dissolute Scot, the Zurich-born Mario Adorf looks as tawny here as he did when playing a Mexican in **MAJOR DUNDEE**) and black levels—particularly a scene set within a darkened anteroom of the 99 Club—satisfyingly deep. The mono sound is adequate (the unsettling score is courtesy of Ennio Morricone) and noiseless, but the English dubbing of certain actors (Adorf in particular, revoiced with an annoying highlands burr) is problematic, affecting comprehension of soft-spoken dialogue. The disc has been encoded with 25 chapters. Supplements include a 3m 4s theatrical trailer, a filmography for Lado, and the 11m 31s featurette “Strange Days of the Short Nights,” in which a white-bearded Lado recalls his difficulties with Ruzzolini (with whom he eventually came to blows) and the pessimism that would inform much of his work to come.

A more standard *giallo* is **THE CASE OF THE BLOODY IRIS** [*Perché quelle strane gocce di sangue sul corpo di Jennifer?*, 1972], better known as **WHAT ARE THOSE STRANGE DROPS OF BLOOD ON THE BODY OF JENNIFER?** and directed by Giuliano Carnimeo under the alias “Anthony Ascott.” Produced by Luciano Martino, who had bankrolled brother Sergio's **BLADE OF THE RIPPER** aka **NEXT** [*Lo strano vizio della*

Signora Wardh, 1970] and **THEY'RE COMING TO GET YOU** [*Tutti i colori del buio*, 1972], this production reunites the voluptuous Algerian actress Edwige Fenech and South American actor George Hilton (aka Jorge Hill Acosta y Lara, a cousin of Martino) with scenarist Ernesto Gastaldi and composer Bruno Nicolai, all staples of Martino's *gialli*. Fenech stars as British commercial model Jennifer Lansbury—introduced at a photo shoot where she models a blouse painted onto her bare chest—who, with her flighty Italian roommate Marilyn Ricci (Paola Quattrini), occupies a newly vacant apartment in a highrise where two women were recently murdered—one of them (**TORSO**'s Carla Brait) drowned in the bathtub of their very flat. With her estranged husband Adam (Ben Carrá, a poor man's Ivan Rassimov) demanding she return to his world of hazy metaphysics and group sex, Jennifer flees into the arms of architect Andrea Barto (Hilton). When the murders continue and she is menaced by a masked man, Jennifer begins to distrust everyone around her: husband Adam, flirty neighbor Sheila (Annabella Incontrera), the brash lesbian's disapproving father (**HORROR EXPRESS**' Jorge Rigaud), and even the tender Andrea, despite his claim to be sickened by the sight of even one drop of blood—a weakness linked to—what else?—a childhood trauma.

THE CASE OF THE BLOODY IRIS boasts all of the narrative tropes of the proper *giallo*: a masked and gloved killer, the glimmer of cutting steel, a damsel-in-distress whose beauty is matched only by her vulnerability, the allure of forbidden carnality (multiple-partner and same-sex), and a cast of sweaty red herrings (whose number includes Luciano Pigozzi, aka “Alan Collins,” as a sleazy strip club owner). For those who have seen the Gastaldi-scripted **BLADE OF THE RIPPER** and **THEY'RE COMING TO GET YOU**, this will all feel a touch shopworn, even reactionary in its demonizing of (and punishment for) lesbianism; likewise, many of Gastaldi's pet plot particulars (however taboo-shattering in their day) seem sophomorically lascivious in retrospect. On the plus side, Carnimeo employs a couple of ahead-of-their-time suspense setpieces: an elevator slashing that anticipates Angie Dickinson's demise in Brian De Palma's *gialloesque* **DRESSED TO KILL** (1980) and an in-broad-daylight gutstabbing that seems the inspiration for a similar killing in Dario Argento's **TENEBRE** (1982). Spaghetti Western director Carnimeo (like Gastaldi, star Hilton and cinematographer Stelvio Massi, an alumnus of the “Sartana” series)

approaches this psycho-thriller with gusto and wit, opening with the image of a woman feeding a brass *gettone* into a pay telephone—a sly reference to the *giallo*'s roots in the Italian tradition of “white telephone” movies.

THE CASE OF THE BLOODY IRIS is presented in widescreen, at 2.30:1. There are moments of print damage, albeit slight, but the image is clear. The Eastmancolor looks a touch degraded (compare the elevator attack with the corresponding footage in the accompanying trailer) but still colorful (check out the Mondadori *giallo* paperbacks, with their distinctive yellow covers, during the scene at the corner newsstand, at 57m 43s). The English dubbed mono soundtrack is satisfactory, if undistinguished. (The revoicing artist dubbing Oreste Lionello makes an attempt at mimicking the air-sucking intonations of comedian Woody Allen, whom the Greece-born actor resembles somewhat.) The disc has 25 chapters. Anchor Bay has included a filmography for Giuliano Carnimeo and a shorter (less violent) edit of the curbside stabbing scene, set aside as a bonus. More impressive, however, is the letterboxed trailer (2m 30s), which features a great deal of truly alternate footage, including a take of the bathtub killing in which Carla Brait wears a bra, an additional angle of fireside lovemaking between Fenech and Hilton, and a shot of a prosthetic throat slashing effect not used in the final cut. **THE CASE OF THE BLOODY IRIS** is the only title in this collection

not offered for individual sale—which is surprising, as it is probably the most familiarly attractive of the four titles to anyone who knows what “*giallo*” means.

Venice is the setting for Aldo Lado's second feature film, **WHO SAW HER DIE?** Australian actor George Lazenby stars as Franco Serpieri, an *avant garde* sculptor living alone in Venice following his estrangement from wife Elizabeth (Anita Strindberg), who has custody of their only child Roberta (**DEEP RED**'s Nicoletta Elmi). On the eve of an important exhibition in Beirut, Franco is visited by Roberta, who plays in the street with the local children while Franco whiles away the afternoon in a steamy dalliance with a local woman (Rosemarie Lindt). As dusk settles, Roberta is nowhere to be found, and the next day her corpse is found floating in the lagoon. Reconciling with Elizabeth but getting nowhere with the local authorities, Franco and a journalist friend (Piero Vida) begin their own investigation, which unearths the facts of an earlier murder of another redheaded girl—and a possible conspiracy of silence involving influential art dealer Serafian (Adolfo Celi), his French mistress Ginerva (Dominique Boschero), Ginerva's bisexual boytoy Philip (Peter Chatel) and Bonaiuti (José Quaglio), a lawyer suspected of being a child molester.

True *gialli* have at the back of their murderous agenda a subtext revealing the threads connecting all human life, with killer, victim and sleuth

Years before Demi Moore wore a painted suit on the cover of VANITY FAIR, Edwige Fenech blazed the trail in Giuliano Carnimeo's THE CASE OF THE BLOODY IRIS.





Ex-007 George Lazenby and *BARON BLOOD*'s Nicoletta Elmi have a warm father/daughter rapport in Aldo Lado's Venetian giallo, *WHO SAW HER DIE?*

separated by considerably fewer than six degrees. This association betrays not only the proximity of evil in even the most mundane settings, but also its connaturality to assumed absolutes of decency and innocence. While not forsaking the sociopolitical implications of **SHORT NIGHT OF GLASS DOLLS**, Aldo Lado (who shares screenplay credit with Massimo D'Avak, Francesco Barilli and **SHORT NIGHT** "script collaborator" Ruediger von Spiess) personalizes **WHO SAW HER DIE?** by depicting Venice as the archetypal small town, where children play, adults work, and the smart set warms the seats at the local *trattoria* in debate over Big Issues. With Serafian's proclamation that the modern artist "merely records, he does not create," the audience is set up to expect that Franco is fated to witness Roberta's murder (that he will see her die); when Franco's selfishness denies him this certainty, Serafian's paradigm is changed—as is Franco's destiny. No longer permitted the luxury of commenting on life through art, Franco is forced to participate in solving the mystery. Ironically, it is his mania to obtain closure that drives Franco away from Elizabeth at a time when their mutual grief should unite them; it is this understanding of human behavior *in extremis* that makes **WHO SAW HER DIE?** a compelling drama, as well as a corking thriller.

Previous gray market dupes of **WHO SAW HER DIE?** were invariably too washed-out and too dark to permit viewers to appreciate fully the film's humanity and ambient texture. Anchor Bay's transfer is attractively letterboxed (2.27:1) and its color palate nicely variegated; not only are skin tones

accurately rendered, but differences in complexion speak volumes about personality (Franco's robustness, Bonaiuti's sallowness, Elizabeth's aggrieved pallor). The clarity of the image here does wonders for the often-criticized performance of George Lazenby, who acquits himself nicely as the self-involved (but not unloving) Franco; his early scenes with Nicoletta Elmi are sweet and feel true-to-life (particularly the bit where Franco and Roberta play "Telephone" with a pair of snail shells). Although the opening titles are in Italian, this disc bears the English dub (even Lazenby is revoiced). The mono soundtrack is fine, although Ennio Morricone's abrasively haunting soundtrack, featuring a children's choir, seems mixed a bit high for comfort (which may be the point). The disc has been given 24 chapters, listed on the flip-side of an insert bearing striking (if misleading) original poster art. A 3m 9s trailer is included, which again includes several shots not seen in the finished film (one, of Adolfo Celi holding a handgun, is especially intriguing).

Although Aldo Lado's filmography is a repeat of the one offered on the **SHORT NIGHT OF GLASS DOLLS** disc, the accompanying video interview is entirely new and specific to this film. "Death In Venice: Looking Back At **WHO SAW HER DIE?**" (11m 8s) finds the grandfatherly Lado reminiscing about making his second film back in his old hometown ("full of hidden streets and quarters that are remote and strange"), of helping Bernardo Bertolucci prepare for **LAST TANGO IN PARIS** and of working with ex-007 George Lazenby (whom Lado notes made "not a single *lira*" from



The influence of Hitchcock's shower murder can be seen in many gialli, in the form of staccato detail shots such as these from WHO SAW HER DIE?

ON HER MAJESTY'S SECRET SERVICE). Lado also broaches the hot potato topic of pedophilia, laughing off the admittedly problematic tradition ("I think that all boys who joined the Boy Scouts and wore shorts had their naked knees touched by 'bad priests'"), rather than pontificating.

Antonio Bido's first film, 1977's *Il gatto dagli occhi di giada*, 1977 [reviewed as **THE CAT'S VICTIMS** in VW 34:11] acknowledged with its very title a debt to Dario Argento's "Animal Trilogy." The success of Bido's debut created the demand for more of the same, and for his sophomore outing, **THE BLOODSTAINED SHADOW** [*Solamente nero*, 1978], Bido employed the plot devices of repressed memory from both **BIRD** and **DEEP RED** and even hired **SUSPIRIA**'s Stefania Casini to play his heroine, while Goblin performed a score composed for the

film by Stelvio Cipriani. Plagued by a series of mysterious fugue-like attacks, *professore* Stefano D'Arcangelo (Lino Capolicchio, from Pupi Avati's **THE HOUSE WITH THE LAUGHING WINDOWS**) takes a leave from his Roman teaching post to return to his island home, near Venice. After making the acquaintance of Sandra Sellani (Casini), a temperamental antiques dealer, Stefano is reunited with his brother Paolo (Craig Hill), a Catholic priest. In town, Paolo is unnerved by the presence of a local medium, whose clientele consists of a physician (Attilio Duse) suspected of murdering his wife, a midwife (**EYES WITHOUT A FACE**'s Juliette Mayniel) believed to perform abortions on the side and a moneyed pederast (**DON'T LOOK NOW**'s Massimo Serato) posing "a continued moral threat" to Paolo's young parishioners. When the medium is strangled to death outside the church





*Seeing as this is the most obvious psychopath in the cast, giallo logic dictates that he's probably the least of your worries in Antonio Bido's **THE BLOODSTAINED SHADOW**.*

rectory and Paolo, a witness to the murder, begins to receive threatening notes, Stefano offers to turn his mathematical mind to unmasking the killer.

If too many of **THE BLOODSTAINED SHADOW**'s plot points feel over-familiar, director Bido (who co-wrote the script with future wife Marisa Andalo and Domenico Malan) jumbles the particulars in a way that keeps the viewer pleasantly offguard, at least initially. While the casting of Craig Hill (an expatriate American actor whose career arc ranged from cowboy heroes to unhinged villains) gives the anxious Don Paolo an instantly sinister aspect, the murder of the medium under his bedroom window instantly exonerates him—while Stefano (with whom the audience expects to identify) turns up in a rain-soaked mackintosh and offers no alibi. This is a tasty reversal of expectations, but it only goes so far and **THE BLOODSTAINED SHADOW** quickly becomes routine (with director Bido at one point resorting to a cheap *accordion* scare). Although Hill gives one of his better performances, Lino Capolicchio and Stefania Casini leave much to be desired as the young protagonists, which is no doubt why the film seems to lag in its mid-section. Happily, the sumptuous cinematography of Mario Vulpiani (whose CV ranges from Marco Ferreri's *La grande bouffe* to Stuart Gordon's **CASTLE FREAK**) and the Venice locations divert pleasantly from a mystery that never really burns and some of Bido's narrative and stylistic touches

(an opening montage of a young girl's beating death, a typewritten note with a telltale imperfection, the medium's murder in the rain) anticipate similar setpieces in such later films as Erik Skjoldbjærg's **INSOMNIA**, Richard Marquand's **THE JAGGED EDGE** and Dario Argento's **TRAUMA**.

THE BLOODSTAINED SHADOW is letterboxed at 1.83:1, and the disc has been afforded 28 chapters, listed on an insert bearing original three-color poster art that recalls earlier artwork for **SUSPIRIA**. Again, this is the English dub and reasonably robust (particularly the pounding score performed by Goblin). Colors are strong and black levels, if not optimal, are reasonably satisfying. Although the anamorphic authoring by Crest National is remarkable for all the discs in this collection, **THE BLOODSTAINED SHADOW** wins hands-down for the best menu screens, which grab (and enhance, for added spookiness) the film's *leitmotif* of religious icons and antique dolls. In addition to a brief Antonio Bido filmography, a letterboxed theatrical trailer (3m 26s) is included, as is the featurette "Solamente Bido" (13m 10s). Gray-haired but remarkably youthful, Bido speaks of his influences and of the experience making **THE BLOODSTAINED SHADOW**. Preparing a new project, Bido waxes nostalgia about the *giallo* subgenre in a way that few would dispute: "While it's true that we made some junk, we also produced some beautiful films."



HERCULES

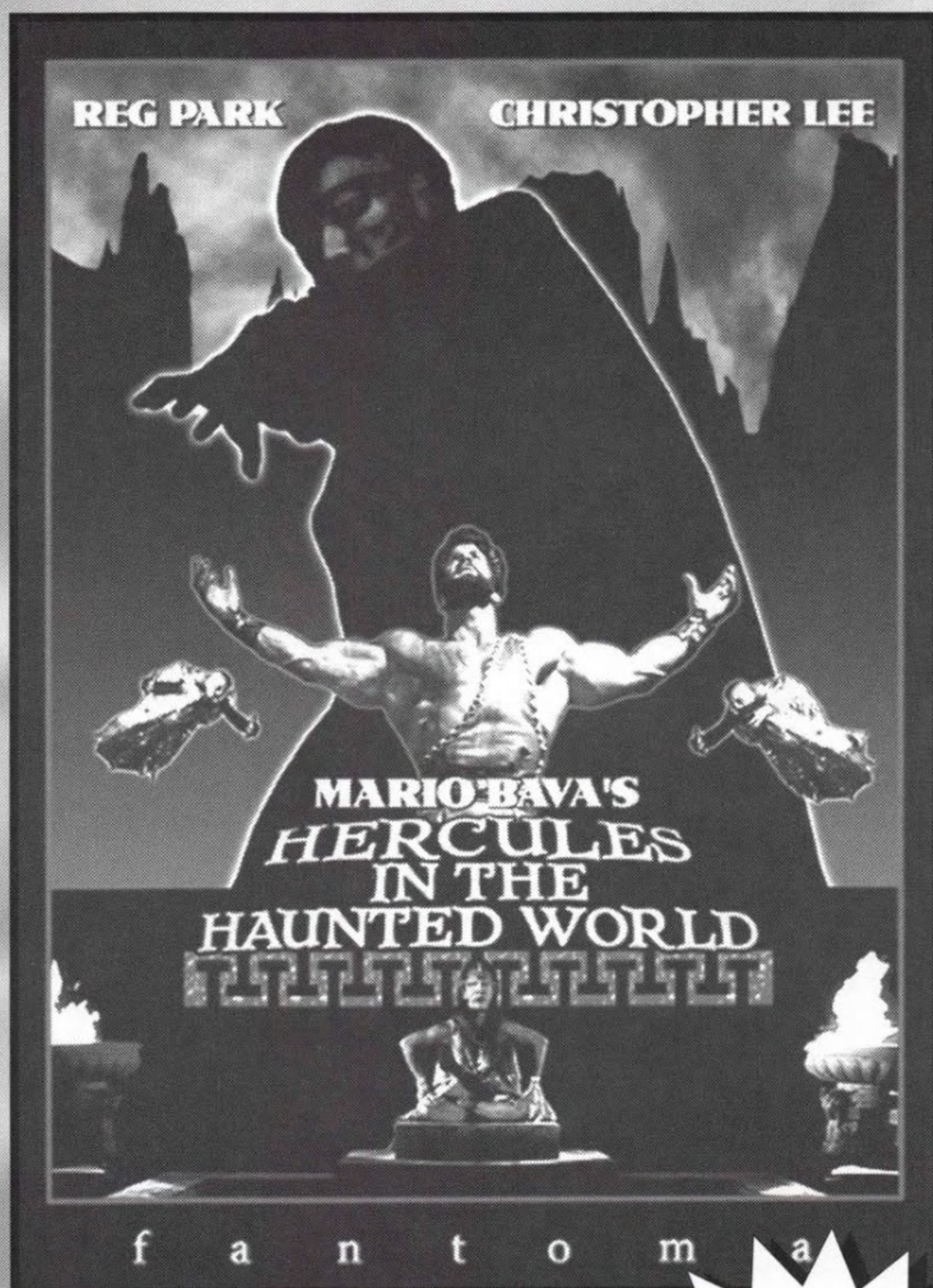
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DVDs



Amélie (Audrey Tautou) is concerned about her father's (Rufus's) devotion to a garden gnome in Jean-Pierre Jeunet's whimsical AMÉLIE.

AMÉLIE

La Fabuleux Destin d'Amélie Poulain

"The Fabulous Destiny of Amélie Poulain"

2001, Miramax Home Entertainment, DD-5.1/16:9/LB/+, \$29.99, 129m 24s, DVD

Jean-Pierre Jeunet's **AMÉLIE** reminded me of Groucho Marx canoeing with Thelma Todd in **HORSE FEATHERS**. Thelma: "Oh Professor, you're so full of whimsy!" Groucho: "Can you notice it from there? I'm always that way after I eat radishes." There must have been a bumper crop for radishes in France

recently: **AMÉLIE** is loaded with whimsy and Jeunet's frivolous assault tactics make it impossible not to notice, try as we might.

AMÉLIE is the story of an anxious, imaginative and eccentric child raised by solitary and neurotic parents to be... all of the above. The fully grown and very beautiful Amélie (Audrey Tautou) appears more infantile than imaginative though, and for someone who seems to represent a self-effacing innocence, she spends a lot of time working on her image. She favors Little Dutch Girl dresses that cling in all the right places, sports the closest thing to a bowl-haircut

that a luscious supermodel would ever consent to, and wears giant clodhopper shoes fresh from Olive Oyl's closet. Jeunet is aiming, at the very least, for a fashionable revival of Alvy Singer's old girlfriend, Amélie Hall. The film begins with an engaging, warp-speed look at the first ten years of little Amélie's picturesque upbringing as she hurtles from egg to tykedom in the blink of an eye. The sequence is a blast of bullet-train montage, purposely clumsy animation, and extravagantly wide angled views of young Amélie's overactive imagination. Jeunet's sugar-rush technique works; the segment is both

playful and solemn, suggesting a sunny version of the accelerated aging process suffered by the little girl in the prologue to **THE HAUNTING**. But Jean-Pierre... just... won't... quit. Some films beg for our indulgence: **AMÉLIE** hogties us and locks us in the closet till we give it up. The sugar-rush buzz wears off and depression sets in as the movie accelerates into a romantic comedy for people with Attention Deficit Disorder. **AMÉLIE** is relentlessly chipper, but it's an artificial sweetener.

Just how artificial? Amélie lives in a digitally beautified version of an already beautiful Montmartre; almost every frame of the movie has been run through a computer. The sets in this film are decorated like holiday cakes, frosted with Christmas cookie colors of red and green. In the best tradition of holiday dining, the movie is engorged, crammed with *faux-naïf* art and kitsch artifacts that would be more at home floating in Macy's Thanksgiving Parade. Even the TVs look handmade. The movie is set in springtime, however, so I'm not sure the conceit really means anything other than Jeunet likes the look of festive garage sales. The film may be stuffed with yummy turkey dressing, but the plot itself is fasting: Amélie returns some childhood toys to a man who hasn't seen them in forty years, his joyful response inspires Amélie to go forth and repeat the trick, bringing instant pleasure to sad souls everywhere while continuing to ignore her own happiness. An eccentric (the only kind of person in this movie) young stranger finally catches her eye and her heart. Will she make the jump from being a lonely eccentric to a sociable eccentric? Does the Pope like Christmas movies?

It's easy to see why Jeunet wanted to make a movie about someone who looks like Audrey Tautou. In a film almost completely dependent on superficial effects, Tautou is the only weapon in Jeunet's arsenal that is not digitally enhanced. (At least I don't think she is!) Those indomitable brown eyes give her Mega-gamine Power, the ability to stand in front of a camera in Montmartre and pulverize men in theaters across the Atlantic with just one blink. Her smile is literally turned upside down: she has a sensually swollen upper lip, as if she bailed on the Botox treatment before they got to the rest of her mouth. When Jeunet calms down and allows Tautou some breathing room to relax within her performance, she can gently slide a dagger right into your heart. But Jeunet can't keep his hand out of the cookie jar. He shoves his camera in her face so often that those eyes might as well belong to a deer caught in the headlights (after so much prodding, the audience may not feel like putting on the brakes).

Confession: I'm not a fan of Jeunet's other work, **THE CITY OF LOST CHILDREN** and **DELICATESSEN**. In both those films (as with **AMÉLIE**), he lifted the visual styles of both Terry Gilliam and Tim Burton and when that's all you take from their work, it's petty theft. Gilliam and Burton thrive on exaggerated camera angles and fantastic imagery to energize their films, but their best movies rest on a bedrock of superb acting and writing. **AMÉLIE** achieves a playful spirit, at least occasionally, and it's a far less claustrophobic piece of work than Jeunet's previous films. Though he complains in the DVD commentary about shooting out of doors, the sunlight seems to do him good. Or it would do him good if he weren't busy erasing

it. In Jeunet's hands, the pervasive digital effects are a lazy shortcut to real moviemaking magic, and he seems hard-pressed to roust himself from the computer. Is this a new trend—couch-potato movie-making? Jeunet seems so in love with digitized visions of splendor, he would have handed Dorothy a copy of Photoshop and told her to stay put in Kansas.

Jeunet's allegiance to all things digital pays off in spades with the new double disc DVD release of **AMÉLIE** from Miramax Home Entertainment. The most important feature of this set is the stunning transfer of both Bruno Delbonnel's photography and the all-encompassing CGI effects of Andre Brizard and his crew. The detail is extraordinarily precise and the colors are ripe to bursting. Home video presentations of contemporary films don't get better than this (yet).

The set is also filled to the brim by the DVD-loving director Jeunet. First up is a 12m segment, "The Look of **AMÉLIE**," detailing the various natural and unnatural ways that the director and photographer conspired to evoke the antique valentine look of their movie. There are segments with outtakes and screentests and two live interviews with Jeunet; one, with the cast included, at a screening in France and one at the American Cinemathèque with the Cinemathèque's programmer, Dennis Bartok. The most enjoyable extra is the "Home Movie" of the production of the film, including a behind-the-scene look at the filming of the "orgasm" montage. Completing these generous additions is another, "intimate" interview with Jeunet and two feature-length commentaries by him: one in French, the other in English. —Charlie Largent



Marlene Dietrich makes her screen debut as Lola Lola, the downfall of Prof. Immanuel Rath, in Josef von Sternberg's *THE BLUE ANGEL*.

THE BLUE ANGEL/DER BLAUE ENGEL

1930, Kino on Video, DD-1.0/+, \$34.95, 100m 7s (English)/102m 14s (German), DVD-0

Considered strictly in film historical terms, **THE BLUE ANGEL** is significant because it brought Marlene Dietrich international acclaim and also teamed her, for the first time, with her defining director Josef von Sternberg. These facts tend to overshadow the compelling and sympathetic performance of the film's star actor, Emil Jannings. Dietrich plays the quintessential *femme fatale*, Lola Lola, a can-can girl and singer whose overt sensuality lures German prep school boys to The Blue Angel, the nightclub where she is employed. Scandalized when he discovers that his pupils are

making frequent nocturnal visits there instead of spending their evenings improving their knowledge of the English language and Shakespeare, their professor, Herr Professor Doctor Immanuel Rath (Jannings), takes it upon himself to call at the nightclub with the ostensible aim of putting a stop to their infatuation. It does not take long, however, for the lonely and sexually-repressed professor to become ensnared by Lola Lola's "charms," vulgar and tasteless as they are. He soon becomes Lola's most ardent admirer and then her lover, becoming an object of ridicule for his students. He eventually insists upon marrying Lola Lola, losing his respectability and then his post at the school. The film chronicles Rath's tragic downfall as he joins Lola Lola's *entourage* as a clown and is forced to

endure the humiliation of learning that he is also a cuckold.

Despite the fact that Professor Rath succumbs to the nefarious life of which he initially disapproves, some of his dignity is restored at the end of **THE BLUE ANGEL**, underscoring the tragic dimension of the film, the story of a lonely, aging man seeking to find beauty in his life. Although he may be a hypocrite initially, few men, we come to understand, can resist the sadistic allure of Lola Lola. Dietrich plays the role with an unrestrained sexuality remarkable for its time, her performance augmented by the response it arouses from Jannings.

THE BLUE ANGEL is adapted from the German novel *PROFESSOR UNRATH* by Heinrich Mann—brother of that more famous man of letters, Thomas Mann. (The

addition of the prefix “un” to Professor Rath’s name, performed by one of the students while the Professor is out of the classroom, alters the meaning of his name to “garbage.”) In their work, both writers are preoccupied with the relationship between the values and goals of the artist/intellectual as they frequently conflict with those of a stolid, materialistic middle-class, of the rebellious and sensitive soul who at last gives up his comfortable post of respectability in the pursuit of a higher beauty. Most notable among Thomas Mann’s gallery of sensitive aesthetes is Professor Ashenbach in his famous novella, *DEATH IN VENICE*, the basis for Luchino Visconti’s excellent film adaptation of the same name, with the incomparable Dirk Bogarde in the leading role [VW 47:54]. Like Ashenbach, Professor “Unrath” is a lonely professor, alienated from those with whom he deals every day, sexually repressed, and longing for contact with an ideal yet evasive beauty. Lola Lola is a tease, but no more so than the pubescent youth, Tadzio, with whom Ashenbach falls in love in Venice. Both men sacrifice themselves on the altar of beauty, although the story of Professor Unrath is perhaps less optimistic in its conclusion. This obsession with the individual’s need to ascertain an aesthetic ideal, and particularly the intellectual’s precarious need for expression in an oppressive culture, can be explained in part by the fact that Heinrich and Thomas Mann were themselves sensitive, intelligent artists who witnessed with distaste the rise of fascism in Germany between the World Wars. Indeed, like Marlene Dietrich, who left Germany for Hollywood soon after the premiere of **THE**

BLUE ANGEL in April 1930, Thomas Mann also became an expatriate, eventually settling in Santa Monica, California, as did his brother Heinrich.

An English language version (financed by Paramount) of **THE BLUE ANGEL** was shot simultaneously with UFA Studios’ version. Kino on Video’s edition includes both versions of the film, each on a separate disc, in remarkably clear fullscreen transfers digitally remastered from the 35mm negative, and a remarkably detailed DD-1.0 soundtrack. In addition to the superlative presentations of each version of the film—each has been allotted 21 chapter stops with the same title given to the scene selections—the two-disc set is loaded with supplemental materials.

The German language version includes an insightful audio commentary by German film historian Werner Sudendorf that is quite valuable, and there is an interesting 3m 18s scene comparison in which a portion of the same scene in each version is played side-by-side, so that the viewer can study the differences (the slight nuances in the performances, for instance, the varying length of cuts, and so on). Also included is a 3m 38s portion of the screen test of Marlene Dietrich (who at the time had appeared in only a few theatrical performances) at the Babelsberger studios in October 1929 (filming began in November). Two theatrical trailers are included, the 3m 40s 1930 German theatrical trailer and the 2m 57s 1960s re-release trailer. In addition, there is a 1m 26s portion of an interview with Marlene Dietrich made in Stockholm in 1971, in which she is quick to point out that she was not the “star” of **THE BLUE ANGEL**, nor

even top-billed: the star was the great German silent film actor Emil Jannings. Also included are 9m 12s of extracts from taped live concert performances of Marlene Dietrich, one from 1963 and two from 1972, in which she performs songs made famous in **THE BLUE ANGEL**: “Falling in Love Again,” “You’re the Cream in My Coffee” (which she performed in her screen test as well, because, in her words, it was a “very naughty” song), and “Lola.”

Additional supplements include several dozen production stills, copies of UFA’s premiere release poster, the 1951 re-release poster, and a detailed chronology of the production and both release and re-release information, and the requisite cast and filmmaker biographies. In short, the supplements consist of the materials necessary to increase one’s understanding of the accomplishment of the film as well as its cultural impact, precisely the function of such supplements. Kino on Video’s edition is superlative in every respect. —Rebecca & Sam Umland

THE CRY OF THE OWL

Le cri du hibou

1987, All Day Entertainment, DD-2.0/MA/LB/ST/+, \$24.99, 103m 59s, DVD-0

Filmmaker Claude Chabrol and suspense novelist Patricia Highsmith find common cause in this French language update of her 1962 novel *THE CRY OF THE OWL*. In the provinces of central France, Robert Forestier (*La Balance*’s Christophe Malavoy), a pessimistic Parisian self-exiled to Vichy while his divorce goes through, spends his lonely evenings spying into the country home of Juliette (Mathilda



Christophe Malavoy, his wall adorned by an ever-vigilant hawk, discovers his true nature as a voyeur in Claude Chabrol's THE CRY OF THE OWL.

May). Taking reassurance in Juliette's more stable home life, Robert eventually introduces himself to confess his voyeurism. Although she had come to sense (and fear) his presence, Juliette warms to Robert's attention and admits she is not as happy as she seems. With her boyfriend Patrick (Jacques Penot) away on business, Juliet joins Robert for some innocent dinners out, triggering gossip that alerts Patrick to his fiancée's apparent infidelity. Hostility between Robert and Patrick comes to a head one night in a violent confrontation along a lonely stretch of country road. The next day, Patrick's disappearance delights Juliette, but leads a local cop (**WEEKEND**'s Jean-Pierre Kalfon) to believe that Robert Forestier is significantly more than a mere Peeping Tom.

The growing dependence of flawed protagonists on charismatic but (inevitably) unstable

strangers will ring a bell for anyone familiar with Alfred Hitchcock's **STRANGERS ON A TRAIN** (1951), Wim Wenders' **THE AMERICAN FRIEND** (1977), René Clément's **PURPLE NOON** (1960) or Anthony Minghella's recent **THE TALENTED MR. RIPLEY** (2000). What sets **THE CRY OF THE OWL** apart from these other Patricia Highsmith adaptations is an authorial insistence on divvying up the blame for villainy into equal shares among all interested parties. Although it updates well, Highsmith's novel was an artifact of the Cold War, of conspicuous consumption in Jack Kennedy's America (the novel's protagonist even lives at "The Camelot Arms"), where keeping up with the Joneses necessitated keeping an eye on them. The inability of people to leave one another alone is the trigger for this morality play of passion, panic and prevarication, relocated from the

novel's Pennsylvania setting to Vichy (still associated with the shame of French collaboration) by Chabrol and co-scenarist Odile Barski. Chabrol's attraction to the Highsmith novel is certainly understandable, given his career-long fascination with mystery, suspense and (more autobiographically) the petty insecurities and jealousies of the *petit-bourgeoisie* in such films as **Les bonnes femmes** [reviewed VW 71:48], **Les biches** and the revenge thriller **Que la Bête Meure** [US: **THIS MAN MUST DIE**].

Moderately successful at the time of its theatrical run in France, this Franco-Italian co-production was not released in the United States until 1991, after which copyright litigation kept the film off the VHS market. **THE CRY OF THE OWL** makes its small screen debut under the aegis of All Day Entertainment. Presented in French

with non-removable English subtitles, the film has been letterboxed around 1.66:1. Despite being mastered from the original negative, the image on this All-Region DVD falls considerably short of the “gorgeous” transfer promised on ADE’s website. While the image is acceptable in terms of color, with lifelike fleshtones (fans of Mathilda May’s turn as the nude space vampire of Tobe Hooper’s **LIFEFORCE** be warned: the actress remains clothed throughout), there is a fair amount of grain and a chalky quality to dimly-lit interiors and night scenes (which occasionally obscures details crucial to the narrative). There are also incidents of frame damage—nothing serious, but purists should know what they’re getting here. The 2.0 mono French soundtrack is very robust.

On a separate audio track, All Day honcho David Kalat alternates commentary with gravel-voiced film historian (and former EUROPEAN TRASH CINEMA contributor) Ric Menello. While Kalat argues for Chabrol’s distinction as the true pioneer of the French New Wave, Menello discusses the writer-director’s longstanding desire to adapt a Patricia Highsmith novel and of Chabrol’s penchant for pinball and a noisy environment in which to write; this shared commentary track is a little dry, but is informative, especially for avowed Chabrol fans. A postcard sized insert boasts the film’s Italian title (**Il gruppo del gufo**), with lewd artwork that gooses the story’s voyeuristic possibilities, while raising false expectations about its nonexistent sexual content. The flipside of this insert reveals a *faux* to-do list inscribed in (presumably) Juliette’s hand—a cute teaser for the film, but it takes

up space that probably should have gone to a listing of the disc’s 21 chapters. Rounding out the bonus materials is a gallery of 13 posters, stills and lobby cards from the film. A flashing ad for Virginia’s mail-order Video Vault rental service precedes the standard FBI warning. —Richard Harland Smith

EDGE OF SANITY

aka *Dr. Jekyll et Mr. Hyde*

1988, MGM Home Entertainment, DD-2.0/SS/16:9/LB/CC/+, \$14.98, 90m 14s, DVD-1

Stylish, inspired and unapologetically sleazy, this British/Hungarian co-production from Edward Simons (**THE BITCH**) and the indefatigable Harry Alan Towers was Anthony Perkins’ last starring role in a theatrical feature, prior to a supporting role in the Spanish-made **THE NAKED TARGET** [*Los Gusanos no llevan bufanda*, 1991] and nearly a half-dozen made-for-TV movies. Since Perkins’ 1992 AIDS death and the publication of Charles Winecoff’s riveting biography *SPLIT IMAGE* with its revelations of Perkins’ own double life, bisexual lifestyle, identity problems and recreational drug use, **EDGE OF SANITY** has absorbed a retroactive aura of self-confession that adds significantly to its queasy allure.

The umpteenth retelling of Robert Louis Stevenson’s novella *DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE*, this script by J.P. Félix and Ron Raley apologizes for its redundancy in some interesting ways: by rooting Jekyll’s psyche in a traumatic, sexual childhood incident out of Sacher-Masoch’s *VENUS IN FURS*, by identifying the chemical agent responsible for Jekyll’s transformation as free-based cocaine, and by reinventing Edward Hyde

as Jack Hyde (whose prostitute slayings give rise to the legend of “the Ripper”). The combination of these elements has the uncanny effect of unleashing a decadent all-too-emblematic of the late 20th Century (described by Perkins himself as having an “Iggy Pop/David Byrne look”) on Victorian London. As Hyde runs amok through a remarkably clean and spotlit Whitechapel, it’s hard not to imagine Johnny Rotten sneering, “We’re the future—*your* future!” just beneath the rain-slicked surface.

As a young teen, Henry Jekyll was caught and beaten after eavesdropping on a sexual encounter between a prostitute and his father in a barn. As an adult, Dr. Henry Jekyll (Perkins) is lame and must walk with a cane (a perpetual reminder of that beating), but he has otherwise matured into a tanned, trim, well-dressed chief of surgery at a prominent London hospital, well-respected within his profession and community, and contentedly married to Elizabeth (Glynis Barber). Jekyll, who has been using cocaine as a stimulant to carry him through daily rigors and nightly research, sets himself a goal to alleviate the pain of pre-anaesthetic surgery, whereupon he discovers the numbing properties of the drug. When a laboratory monkey dilutes a pile of cocaine with alcohol and triggers a narcotic vapor, the fumes unleash the Hyde side of Jekyll, who promptly acquaints himself with Whitechapel’s other denizens of the night. He encounters a prostitute, Susannah (Sarah Maur Thorp), who resembles the laughing whore who presided over his childhood whipping, but loses track of her after caning the man in her company. He proceeds to slash a series of

prostitutes with "surgical precision," and the murders leave the constabulary, as always, baffled. Unable to resist the drug, Jekyll/Hyde returns to Whitechapel and is led by male prostitute Johnny (Ben Cole, who wears makeup on only one eye, à la **A CLOCKWORK ORANGE**) to the brothel of Madame Flora (**THE SERVANT**'s Jill Melford), where he subjects Suzannah and Johnny not to the blade of his scalpel, as expected, but to the violence of his pipe—unleashing their darkest sides and using them to restage and gain control over his childhood trauma. In response to the Whitechapel murders, a local church opens its doors as a temporary shelter for the streetwalkers, with Jekyll's charity-conscious wife taking charge of the operation. Putting together her husband's own stories of working by night with someone named Hyde and the prostitutes' stories of saucy Jack,

Elizabeth begins to suspect that the secret of her husband's mysterious whereabouts can only be discovered by paying a visit to his forbidden laboratory...

Under the direction of Gérard Kikoïne (a former editor on films such as Claude Mulot's **PUSSY TALK** [*Le Sexe qui Parle*, 1975] who graduated to directing soft- and hardcore porn), this curious conflation of the 1950s Richard Gordon productions **CORRIDORS OF BLOOD** and **THE HAUNTED STRANGLER** [reviewed VW 37:64] suffers a bit from an imbalance between the Jekyll and Hyde portions of the story. Not only is Perkins' performance as Jekyll thwarted by an unconvincing, come-and-go British accent, but Jekyll's entire world consists of people with post-synchronized voices and relationships (such as with attorney and confidant Underwood played by David Lodge, replacing the Utterson of the novel.)

that are introduced only to be dropped. In the Hyde scenes, however, Perkins, Maur Thorp and Cole are all recorded live, giving their roles greater immediacy, and Perkins' performance here is also far more centered and self-assured; he hops into the midst of these orgies like an experienced seaman taking command at the wheel of a most unlikely yacht, and his air of seasoned efficiency at the helm of various naughtiness—as he connives to arouse an onlooker by having a prostitute masturbate herself with his cane, for example—combines with an occasionally glimpsed tongue-in-cheek amusement that is weirdly endearing. Hyde is neither as great or blasphemous a role for Perkins as was **CRIMES OF PASSION**'s Rev. Peter Shayne, but it is also far from the career embarrassment most mainstream critics of the time made it out to be. Adding

Anthony Perkins as a Dr. Jekyll whacked-out on freebased cocaine in Gerard Kikoïne's outrageous Jekyll & Hyde retread, EDGE OF SANITY.



conspicuously to the film's interest is Tony Spratling's wild angled cinematography and the colorful, expressionistic art direction attributed to Fred Carter (**THE FEARLESS VAMPIRE KILLERS**, Polanski's **MACBETH**, **FRANKENSTEIN: THE TRUE STORY**) and Tivadar Bertalan (Curtis Harrington's **MATA HARI**); together, they deliver a Whitechapel whose slutty exteriors evoke the opening shots of Michael Powell's **PEEPING TOM** while the interiors at Madame Flora's suggest a show staged by China Blue. (Maur Thorp actually appears in nun drag, at one point.) Jekyll's scenes are naturalistic, but the indoor/outdoor worlds visited by Hyde are presented as opposing worlds of red and blue, with Hyde dragging the blue of night along with him, pegging him as a true denizen of the dark. Particularly memorable, for some reason, is the inverted imagery of Jekyll's lab—wrecked by Hyde—with all the splashes and handprints and foul graffiti on its tiled walls not the expected violent red, but rather an enticingly pale blue.

EDGE OF SANITY made its US video debut in the US in 1990 on the Virgin Vision label, which released it on VHS in its R-rated US theatrical cut and in a separate, unrated edition. Omitted from the R version were dripping close-ups of various throat slashings, some simulated masturbation, and gratuitous full frontal male nudity at Jekyll's health club. MGM's new DVD, which is cheaply priced but not part of their "Midnite Movies" line, carries an R-rating on the box, but be relieved (or forewarned): it is actually the uncut version. The two-sided, anamorphically enhanced disc offers the film in both widescreen (1.83:1) and standard framing, which is fortunate, because this is one of

those cases where the standard version offers more picture—and, in some shots, more nudity; the widescreen image adds nothing to the sides while matting the image slightly on top and slightly more on the bottom. (When Hyde wields his scalpel in front of Elizabeth in the climactic scene, the moment carries more weight in the standard version, where a wedding ring visibly adorns the hand of danger.) There is also a nice, if unexceptional, Dolby surround track that adds to the film's overall melodrama. English is the only sound option, but English, French and Spanish subtitles are included. —Tim Lucas

GRAVEYARD OF HORROR

Necrophagus
aka *El Descuartizador de Binbrook*

1971, Image Entertainment,
DD-1.0/+, \$19.99, 86m 25s, DVD-1

Although Image Entertainment has added **GRAVEYARD OF HORROR** to its "EuroShock" series, the release itself shuns any mention of its European pedigree, crediting the pseudonymous authorship attached to prints of *Necrophagus* prepared for export out of Spain in 1971. Director "Michael Skaife" is actually Miguel Madrid, whose Gothic apprenticeship encompassed a bit in Jess Franco's *Le Sadique Baron von Klaüs* (1962) and co-writing José Maria Elorietta's *Las Amantes del Diablo* (1970) before trying his own hand at feature filmmaking. After Madrid won the "Best Director" prize at the 1971 Sitges *Festival de la Cine de Terror* (in a tie with Janusz Majewski, for the Polish language *Lokis*), *Necrophagus* was bought by Sam Sherman's Independent-International Pictures Corp., who

distributed several Paul Naschy vehicles in the US, starting with *La Marca del Hombre Lobo* (retitled **FRANKENSTEIN'S BLOODY TERROR**). Given the more prosaic tag **GRAVEYARD OF HORROR**, *Necrophagus* played only on television and later turned up on VHS (through Super Video), and as **NECROMANIAC** (from All American Video) before lapsing into deeper obscurity.

It is difficult to judge the merits of *Necrophagus* based solely on the jumble that is **GRAVEYARD OF HORROR**, but the scenario is certainly familiar: Michael Skeffington (Bill Curran) is called home to his Scottish estate, where he learns that his wife Elizabeth (Inés Morales, aka Senny Green—later the gypsy who put the bite on Paul Naschy in **CURSE OF THE DEVIL**, 1973) has died in childbirth. Confounding Michael's grief is the disappearance of his scientist brother Robert, whose partner Dr. William Lextor (Francisco Braña Perez, aka Frank Braña, of Amando de Ossorio's **RETURN OF THE BLIND DEAD**, 1973) has made himself a discomfiting fixture in the ancestral manse. With Elizabeth's family hostile to him, and the local gravedigger (**HORROR EXPRESS**'s José Maria Soler Vilanova, aka Victor Israel) forbidding him to exhume Elizabeth's body, Michael breaks into the cemetery by night, discovering that Elizabeth's coffin and several others are empty. Michael's subsequent disappearance prompts his adoring niece Margaret (Beatriz Lacy, aka Beatriz Elorrieta) and a police inspector (John Clark, a familiar face in such Euro-westerns as **SHALAKO**, **EL CONDOR** and **CATLOW**) to begin their own investigations into the mystery of Binbrook Castle—unaware that they are putting themselves in



Frank Braña, at the mercy of God-knows-what,
in the bizarre Spanish fright flick *GRAVEYARD OF HORROR*.

jeopardy at the hands of greedy heirs, desperate hangers-on, and something in the graveyard that isn't quite dead.

If **GRAVEYARD OF HORROR** is anything like *Necrophagus* was intended to be, Miguel Madrid wasn't much of a filmmaker. Beginning at the end, Madrid jumbles his chronology, defaulting to flashbacks revealing no further information than was tendered originally. Some scenes seem misplaced; the gravedigger (revealed to be a villainous hireling) is shown boiling down Elizabeth's sundered *cabeza* to gleaming bone, only to have the intact head turn up later in the office of the village doctor. However handsome the cinematography of veteran DP

Alfonso Nieva, director Madrid too often lacks the coverage to allow his shots to cut together, with none worse off than Michael's *tete-a-tete* with the headhunting gravedigger. Softening the blow is a satiric edge that recalls the cod Gothic affectations of American fringe filmmaker Andy Milligan, who shares Madrid's cynicism about familial ties and hypocritical piety (Elizabeth's family allows her to die for the sin of conceiving a child out of wedlock). **GRAVEYARD OF HORROR** also anticipates the you-can't-go-home-again determinism of Claudio Guerín Hill's **A BELL FROM HELL** [reviewed VW 66:24] and Theodore Gershuny's American

proto-slasher **SILENT NIGHT, BLOODY NIGHT** (especially in its winter setting and the aural accompaniment of glum narration with a warbly church organ), but the comparisons only go so far. It would be unjust to laud **GRAVEYARD OF HORROR** for what it seems to be saying rather than for what it plainly fails to do, but Spanish horror *aficionados* will enjoy recognizing sets and locations used for such Iberian genre classics as **DR. ORLOFF'S MONSTER** (also shot by Alfonso Nieva), **FRANKENSTEIN'S BLOODY TERROR**, and several films by Amando de Ossorio.

Although some sources cite this film as having been shot in scope, this fullframe transfer challenges that assertion with

compositions that look correct; characters spread out within various points of a wide shot setup are all visible with no appreciable loss of visual content. Intended for TV, prints were shorn of nudity (a maladroït bathtub seduction) seen in versions outside the US and **GRAVEYARD OF HORROR** is reportedly identical, content-wise, to earlier American VHS incarnations. Age speckles aside, the image is clear—sometimes remarkably so—but the Eastmancolor is often degraded to the point of monochrome and skin tones have a pinkish hue. If certain scenes on the DVD appear darker than corresponding scenes of earlier video versions, it is because the tape sources lacked optical day-for-night processing—without which the scene set at the Inverness train station reveals a sign for the Spanish city of Algodor. The mono sound is fine, making the overall audio/visual package more or less satisfying, if unimpressive. Pity Image wasn't able to get their hands on original poster art for **Necrophagus**, as the one-sheet was a stunner. Instead, the image fronting the **GRAVEYARD OF HORROR** DVD employs a spoiler screen grab from the film's final moments, which has been tinted in the style of Image's Wade Williams Collection. The disc's 12 chapters are listed on a one-sided paper insert (the flipside is blank) boasting a trio of grainy screen grabs. The disc's jacket copy misspells the main character's surname and grossly misstates the plot of the film. Critical blurbs (which offer no qualitative remarks at all) are provided by VIDEOHOUND'S GOLDEN MOVIE RETRIEVER and Michael Weldon's PSYCHOTRONIC ENCYCLOPEDIA OF FILM—both of which also get the plot details

wrong. If this all seems like a bit of a slop job, the inclusion of a sixpack of trailers for the Philippines-shot Hemisphere releases **THE MAD DOCTOR OF BLOOD ISLAND, THE BLOOD DRINKERS, BEAST OF BLOOD, BRIDES OF BLOOD, CURSE OF THE VAMPIRES** (listed under its new title **BLOOD OF THE VAMPIRES** on both the DVD jacket and the "Extra Bloody Bits" menu screen) and Al Adamson's **BRAIN OF BLOOD** is a decent peace offering. Even more fun is a 1m 50s B&W promo (in beautiful condition) for an evening of live entertainment titled "House of Terror" (presented by "Jack London"!), featuring "The Werewolf" and promising "a ghost show that will scare the YELL out of you!" —Richard Harland Smith

THE IMAGE

aka **THE PUNISHMENT OF ANNE**

1975, Synapse Films,
DD-2.0/SS/MA/16:9/LB/+,
\$29.98, 90m 50s, DVD-0

As a marquee title, Radley Metzger's **THE IMAGE** would not have been readily distinguishable from the other 100-plus X-rated domestic features released in 1976. Although Metzger courted a discriminating audience (to whom he had offered such erotic confections as **CAMILLE 2000, THERESE AND ISABELLE** and **THE LICKERISH QUARTET**), **THE IMAGE** surely attracted—if only by virtue of its Adults Only rating—viewers more accustomed to the likes of **EXPOSE ME LOVELY** and **TELL THEM JOHNNY WADD IS HERE**. God only knows what the raincoat set thought of this elegant yet raunchy item, adapted by Metzger (using the ironic alias "Jake Barnes") from a 1965 novel by

Jean De Berg (a pseudonym for Catherine Robbe-Grillet, actress/dominatrix/wife of novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet, who is also rumored to have played some role in its composition). However continental, this Paris-set tale of desire and sadomasochism among *le beau monde* got no love from the arthouse crowd, forcing Metzger to retitle the film **THE PUNISHMENT OF ANNE** in hope of being embraced by the more forgiving porn market. Metzger's next efforts were five additional X-rated and equally stylish hardcore films, which he signed under the *nom de porn* "Henry Paris."

Metzger had included some hardcore highlights within the sinful syllabus of his 1972 sex romp **SCORE** [reviewed VW 54:18], an adaptation of the Off Broadway play by Jerry Douglas. A same-sex seduction satire shot in Yugoslavia (subbing for the French Riviera), **SCORE** was released in two versions, one replete with the hardcore asides and a "cool" version that left the boy/boy action to the imagination. While bereft of male homosexual content, **THE IMAGE** finds Metzger again breaking new ground with this sensitive yet unflinching look at sexual domination.

At a dull literary party on the Place de Concord, writer Jean (Carl Parker, **SCORE**'s libidinous lineman) is reacquainted with Claire (Marilyn Roberts), an enigmatic older woman with enough money to do as she pleases. When Jean notices a pretty new face in the crowd, Claire announces that Anne (Mary Mendum, who also appeared in some Joe Sarno films under the alias "Rebecca Brooke") is not just *with* her, but that the young model *belongs* to her. Initially

aghast at Claire's cruelty toward the submissive Anne (who is punished by being made to wet herself in a public garden), Jean is eventually drawn into their bizarre lifestyle. Given Anne as a plaything, Jean orchestrates (at Claire's prompting) a series of sexual encounters in cars, telephone kiosks, cafés and boutiques—and ultimately within the windowless confines of Claire's "Gothic Chamber," where the boundaries between master and slave are blurred and it is impossible to tell who holds the whip hand.

THE IMAGE remains potent stuff a quarter century after the fact, due to Metzger's control of the material and mastery of audience expectation. While porn-mongers are required to sit on their hands for a full reel before seeing *any* nudity, others will appreciate (even relish) the way Metzger teases psychology rather than biology. Full nudity does not

enter the picture until 25:27, and even then only in the form of B&W photos shown to Jean to pique his interest. **THE IMAGE** does not resort to its first pornographic act until just past the 40m mark, after which it kicks into high gear with a trio of interludes in which Jean is serviced orally, twice in public. That these vignettes occur in rapid succession creates the false impression that the film will play out, par for porno, as a series of hardcore "numbers" (Anne and Jean risking discovery in a parked car, Anne and Jean in a threesome with a boutique salesgirl); instead, Metzger moves the action (around the 60m mark) into Claire's torture chamber, where Anne is chained up, inquisition-style, to receive a battery of exquisite torments. This intense, nearly 20m setpiece seems inspired by Marilyn Burns' trial by ordeal in **THE TEXAS CHAIN SAW MASSACRE**, and Mary

Mendum's guttural shrieks may even be the more agonized. This is strong stuff, guaranteed to set heartbeats racing or clear the room. (Warning to apartment dwellers: stand by to dial down the volume or have some explaining to do.)

Metzger's catalogue of outrages would not work nearly so well were it not for the committed performances of his principal players. While Carl Parker (who seems stuck on the dial halfway between David Hess and Michael Nouri) fails to convince as an *homme de lettres*, he does fit the bill as a self-styled libertine in way over his head. If Mary Mendum provides **THE IMAGE** with its most courageous performance, the film's most knowing performance belongs to the 36-year-old Marilyn Roberts. Keeping her face an *almost* immobile mask of invulnerability, Roberts communicates Claire's essential insecurity through a series of

Mary Mendum gives a courageous performance as the personal property of Madame Claire in Radley Metzger's decorative S&M fantasy, THE IMAGE.



furtive looks, ranging from predatory to fragile. Taking the sting out of Metzger's use of postsynch dubbing is that his big scenes play out mostly *sans* dialogue, with emotions telegraphed almost exclusively through eye contact. Unlike **SCORE**, which suffered from an inherent face-tiousness, **THE IMAGE** shows the courage of its perversions—although Metzger is not above throwing in the odd visual puns (as when the fountains of the Jardin du Trocadéro spur Jean's memory of Anne's coerced urination, or when cutting from an extreme close up of fellatio to a shot of the Place Vendôme's Napoléon column). Less flashy than previous Audubon films (Metzger started operating his own camera on the set of **SCORE** and here credits the cinematography to the pseudonymous "Rene Lefevre"), **THE IMAGE** is still one of his most visually stunning.

Synapse Films had the benefit of original materials for this nearly flawless letterboxed transfer. From the film's opening frame, of the Place de Concorde at dusk, the image is nothing less than startling in its clarity and in the richness of its saturated colors. Exteriors grabbed in and around Paris' swank Champs de Élysées and interiors filmed in New York impress equally with their beauty (in defiance of what was likely a very limited budget). The scene in the Bagatelle Gardens is particularly noteworthy for the way Metzger reduces the color scheme to a play between reds (roses, Jean's turtleneck, Claire's lipstick), blues (Jean's blazer, Claire's sunglasses, Anne's eyes), greens (the vast stretches of rolling lawn) and whites (Claire's trenchcoat, Anne's skirt). Synapse Films has letterboxed **THE IMAGE** at 1.78:1 (16:9 enhanced). The disc's 11 chapters mirror those of the film

(which at times creates a significant disparity between chapter lengths), which in turn reflect those of the source novel. The original mono sound has been preserved, but a new (thankfully subdued) 2.0 remix is offered as an option; also available is an isolated music track (which ranges from the sublime to the grating, suggesting that Metzger availed himself of extant library tracks). A filmography for Radley Metzger includes trailers for **CARMEN, BABY** (4m 4s), **THERESE AND ISABELLE** (2m 29s), **CAMILLE 2000** (2m 15s), **THE LICKERISH QUARTET** (2m 43s) and **SCORE** (3m 36). —Richard Harland Smith

INGA

Jag—en Oskuld

"I—A Virgin"

1968, Retro-Seduction Cinema, DD-2.0/MA/+, \$19.99, 80m 35s, DVD-0

Retro-Seduction Cinema's cover art for **INGA** hails it as "The Most Acclaimed Masterpiece of Erotic Cinema Ever Created... The Boxoffice Smash That Changed Erotic Cinema... Forever!" But as the film's original Swedish title indicates, **INGA**—the first of many erotic pictures helmed in Sweden by veteran New York writer/director Joseph W. Sarno—was inspired by the success of an earlier Swedish sex import, Mac Ahlberg's *Jag—en Kvinna* [US: **I, A WOMAN**, 1965]. While **INGA**'s claim to acclaim (or notoreity) pales in comparison to, say, Bertolucci's **LAST TANGO IN PARIS** [*L'ultimo tango a Parigi*, 1973], or any number of other candidates, it did make a great deal of money for US distributor Cinemation Industries, made a star of uninhibited 17 year-old Marie Liljedahl, and soon inspired a sequel, *Någon att älska* [US:

THE SEDUCTION OF INGA aka **INGA AND GRETA**, 1969], which reunited Sarno and Liljedahl. The woman writhing in ecstasy on Retro-Seduction Cinema's packaging is not Liljedahl, or the unknown lookalike model featured on the film's original one-sheet, but rather Misty Munda, star of several made-for-video releases from Retro's parent label Seduction Cinema; while misleading in a sense, it's actually a nice *homage* to the poster art of a film that was truly emblematic in its day.

After the death of her younger sister Astrid, 34 year-old widow Greta Johansson (Monica Strömerstedt) agrees to provide a home for her 17 year-old niece, Inga. Greta may be of responsible age and intent, but she is living in denial of her advancing years and shrinking bank account; she dresses young, dances at teenage parties, and is having an affair with a much younger man, aspiring writer Karl Nistad (Casten Lassen), who continually borrows from her to buy a car and even a boat, promising that he will repay her when his book is a big success. Despite the advice of her housekeeper Frida (Else-Marie Brandt, only slightly older than Greta herself), who cautions her that Karl is "a bad investment," Greta continues to indulge her lover to the point of financial distress. A chance for rescue comes from publisher Einar Nilsson (Thomas Ungewitter), her late husband's best friend, whose wife has been committed to a sanitarium and indirectly expresses, through the intervention of his sister Sigrid (Sissi Kaiser), his interest in making Greta his mistress. Greta beds Einar out of curiosity, around the same time that Karl confirms (for us) his lack of commitment by allowing himself to be seduced by a persistent



Marie Liljedahl presides over a remarkable deep focus moment from Joseph W. Sarno's INGA.

blonde. With the arrival of bookish Inga (Liljedahl), Greta immediately perceives her as a threat to her relationship with Karl, and conceives of a plan to “give” her as a companion to Einar in exchange for a monthly \$1,000 salary. Although Inga delights in Einar’s literary company, conversation, and complimentary box seats at the opera, their chemistry is nothing compared to the more primal feelings aroused in her by Karl. Unaware of her aunt’s relationship with Karl, Inga goes to Greta for advice, and though she cynically instructs her niece that sex is natural and she should answer her body’s call for a lover, she does not realize into whose arms she is sending her.

INGA restates a situation already explored in Sarno’s work by this time, that of a small community shaken by the arrival of a magical outsider, predating Pier Paolo Pasolini’s more celebrated treatment of the same theme in

TEOREMA (1968; reviewed VW 18:28). In Sarno’s work, this presence can be either positive or negative, but in this case, the catalyst is naïve and innocent—even of her own appeal. Sarno reportedly wrote the film to be Greta’s story, but once Liljedahl was cast, her charisma overwhelmed the dailies and the script was hastily rewritten (and retitled) to emphasize her character and fate. Likewise, the international attention **INGA** received was surely due to the remarkable, porcelain beauty of Liljedahl, and one particular scene in which her doll-like face hangs, upside down and open-mouthed, off the edge of a bed, as she brings herself to orgasm. While this scene remains enticing, **INGA** is a fairly dry film, more about society than sex, most interesting for its introduction of a theme that would recur throughout much of Liljedahl’s work (**EUGENIE... THE STORY OF**

HER JOURNEY INTO PERVERSION, ANN AND EVE, DORIAN GRAY, etc.): the way young people are sometimes manipulated to satisfy the agendas of their elders. Money manipulates everything in **INGA**, except love; in one of the most telling scenes, Einar discusses his need for companionship with Frida, who is clearly not a candidate for the position—despite their identical ages and their shared memories of innocent sex play when they were children—because, we infer, Frida now works in a position of servitude. Frida’s wisdom may also keep her out of the running; we sense that she could not be conned or manipulated, and none of the other characters (save Inga) associate with anyone they cannot manipulate, with the utmost outward civility, to their own ends. The film may end on a positive note, with Inga’s successful flight from these small town family intrigues, but her

choice of a partner gives us reason to suspect her happiness will not last for long.

The more familiar one is with Sarno's filmography, the more one may be tempted to ascribe **INGA**'s unusual notoreity to its jailbait starlet and its then-racy "made in Sweden" status. It's a very good film, if a bit cold, but ultimately not one of Sarno's best or most erotic pictures. Nevertheless, as photographed in lustrous B&W by Bruce G. Sparks and Helena Englessen, it is one of Sarno's most attractively lensed films, with one particular image—a deep-focus shot of Liljedahl, curled up in bed, looking on as a band of wind-up toy soldiers march toward the camera—is haunting in its uncanny suggestion of, let us say, a cherry ripe for picking. Toys would play an increasingly important role in Sarno's subsequent films (**YOUNG PLAYTHINGS**, **LAURA'S TOYS**), a fascination traceable to this single, central image.

Retro-Seduction's disc offers both the Swedish and English-dubbed versions of the film, as released by Jerry Gross' Cinemation Industries. Both look fairly spotless and razor-sharp, delivering Bruce Sparks' B&W images with extraordinary immediacy. Both versions are identical in terms of content, including an additional scene (at 17:22 - 18:06) of Inga taking an older, bespectacled woman to a train station, which was reportedly photographed in New York (by Gross, not by Sarno) during a brief promotional visit to America by Liljedahl. By presenting both versions side by side, this release inadvertently reveals something heretofore unknown. Cinemation's Swedish version is not Sarno's original

Swedish version; it contains the same changes that were imposed on the English-dubbed version: the scene of Inga's deflowering is shortened with dissolves, and the original score (by Bo Waldsten) was replaced with cacophonous acid rock (by Clay Pitts, Cinemation's answer to Les Baxter) that degraded Sarno's sensitive, exploratory sex scenes to a level of shrill, mind-boggling exploitation. **INGA** was shot open aperture and, judging from the positioning of the subtitles onscreen, were meant to be soft-matted in projection to 1.66:1—making the disc ideal for viewing in 16:9 format, though it is not anamorphically enhanced. Viewed full-frame, the presentation uncovers more image content than the theatrical releases intended; in one scene, Liljedahl wears a sheer nightgown with nothing underneath, revealing pubic hair that was originally blocked by the lower matte. Allegedly transferred from the original 35mm camera negative (but how could this be, given the dissolves and doctored music track?), the Swedish version is generally cleaner, and looks better in 16:9, despite some print instability around the 41m point, than does the English version, which looks a bit softer and contains more surface blemishes.

The English version is accompanied by a round table commentary by Sarno, wife/production associate Peggy Steffans (who also costumed the picture with clothes brought over from a fashionable NYC boutique called Paraphenalia), licensor Sam Sherman, and moderator/film historian Bruce G. Hallenbeck. There is some cross-talk and slow passages (the session comes to its first halt as early as the main titles, and a couple of

later silences are broken with "Joe, can I ask you a question?"), but on the whole, it's an enlightening session with extensive information about the cast members (today, Stömmerstedt works as a judge), the circumstances of production and costuming, the film's international success (everywhere except Sweden), the psychology of Swedes, how stardom affected Liljedahl between the filming of this film (when she was "a very young 17") and **THE SEDUCTION OF INGA**, and Sarno's revelation that the masturbation and sex scenes were authentic, though not explicitly filmed. Sarno and Steffans had clearly never seen the American version prior to this session, and are audibly disappointed by Jerry Gross' tasteless and unnecessary revisions of their work, done for no better reason than "to put his finger in."

Just as interesting is an audio interview with Liljedahl (8m 58s), recorded in September 2001, in which she responds in a most appealing voice to onscreen questions posed by Hallenbeck. His questions are excellent, and the answers, while sometimes unsatisfying and possibly evasive or not fully comprehending, nevertheless open an important door toward a greater understanding and appreciation of this underrated performer. Also among the extras are two **INGA** trailers, a trailer for **THE SEDUCTION OF INGA** (forthcoming on DVD from Retro-Seduction Cinema), and a 9m 20s assortment of curious but non-essential outtakes from the movie, consisting mostly of young Swedes flailing on a dancefloor, which are accompanied by a loop of Pitts' main titles theme. Trailers for other Retro and Seduction Cinema titles



Leelee Sobieski finds her tires endangered by a Rusty Nail in John Dahl's suspenseful road film JOY RIDE.

round out the package, which is highly recommended—though one wishes that Sarno's original version had also been included.

INGA is also available on VHS in separate Swedish (with English subtitles) and English-dubbed editions, also priced at \$19.99 and in a special two-pack priced at \$29.99. —Tim Lucas

JOY RIDE

2001, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, DD-5.1/SS/MA/16:9/LB/ST/CC/+, \$29.99, 96m 21s, DVD-1

An irresistible plot device straight out of William Castle University sparked a no-nonsense screenplay by Clay Tarver and J.J. Abrams. The script, then titled **SQUELCH**, was brought to life by director John Dahl (best known for such acclaimed independent thrillers as **RED ROCK WEST** and **THE LAST SEDUCTION**), who achieved nerve-wracking results—not by showing off how much he knew about past

shockers, but by demonstrating why they worked as well as they did. The deceptively simple project, eventually known as **JOY RIDE**, failed to reach a wide theatrical audience, despite overwhelmingly positive reviews; it now awaits popular rediscovery on a massively-supplemented Special Edition DVD from 20th Century Fox.

College student Lewis Thomas (Paul Walker of 2001's **THE FAST AND THE FURIOUS**) is looking forward to hooking up with his long-distance maybe-girlfriend Venna (Leelee Sobieski of **EYES WIDE SHUT** and TV's **JOAN OF ARC**). When she suggests they could take a trip together—if he only had a car—he impulsively cashes in an expensive plane ticket and buys himself a '70s relic that comes equipped with a vintage CB radio. Another major change of plans occurs once Lewis is underway: he receives news that his brother Fuller (**THAT THING YOU DO!**'s Steve Zahn) has been

arrested on a drunk-and-disorderly charge in the Salt Lake City area. Family loyalty outweighs personal convenience, and Lewis takes a huge detour to bail Fuller out. His pledge to follow the straight-and-narrow notwithstanding, Fuller soon urges Lewis to use his radio for a little prankish fun. Inspired by a strange-talking trucker known as "Rusty Nail," whose voice (that of **THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS**' Ted "Buffalo Bill" Levine) they encounter on the CB, the brothers invent the promiscuous female "Candy Cane" to peak his interest—until they lose his signal. That same night, as the two check into a motel, Fuller is infuriated by the behavior of an abusive, bullying guest he encounters at the check-in desk, while Lewis is startled to hear the voice of Rusty Nail on the radio again. The opportunity is too good to pass up—at Fuller's prompting, Lewis sets Rusty Nail up on a date with Candy Cane—with directions that actually lead

to the room of Fuller's tormentor—and the two retire to their room, waiting for the “fun” to begin. But the prank achieves ghastly results; and regardless of a belated attempt to do the right thing and confess their misdeed, the brothers endure a night of terror that only seems to resolve the issue. They haven't even picked up Vella yet, and the “fun,” indeed, has just begun...

While it's nearly impossible to see a sinister truck in a movie without thinking of Steven Spielberg's **DUEL**, Dahl's film follows a significantly different “road.” The menace, while undeniably sociopathic (and faceless for most of the movie) has a clearly-defined motive; he engages in conversation with his quarry; and at least two of his prey have brought his attention on themselves. That said, there are plenty of scares set on the lonely Nevada roads involving the sudden appearance of a horn-blaring big rig, and they're as effective as ever. Tarver and Abrams succeeded in creating genuinely believable lead characters, and Dahl, sometimes casting against type (especially in Zahn's case, he says) worked well with the actors in connecting them with the viewer. While we can't actively condone Fuller's prank, we easily sympathize with the impulse that makes one want to take advantage of a truly “deserving” target. We're denied the opportunity to lord it over the protagonists (“Call the police, stupid!”), and even as we cringe when one of the brothers delivers a “parting shot” instead of the apology that might let him off the hook, we can still understand his bravado. Our acceptance of Lewis and Fuller isn't limited to their interaction with Rusty Nail, either; the uneasy triangle formed when

Vella joins the travellers, and the encounters with the various strangers they meet on their journey, ring just as true. Ironic humor is specifically avoided (Zahn remarks that his proposed line “What is this... a fucking MOVIE?” during a particularly tense moment was nixed by Dahl, for instance), though there are still laughs to be had, particularly in a sequence involving humiliating public nudity. Yet even here, the sense of danger overpowers all—the suspense is constant and excruciating.

It's one thing to come up with a powerful premise, and quite another thing to bring it to a satisfying conclusion, as this DVD amply demonstrates. The final release version of **JOY RIDE** was only achieved through massive reshooting and reconstruction—and no less than four alternate endings have been made available here. Originally, the last half hour of the film provided a completely different set of complications and consequences, none of which involved the motel that provided the climactic setting in the final cut (it would be just as unfair to spoil the specifics here as it would be elsewhere). The three remaining alternate endings are all variations on the motel setpiece, one of which only existed in storyboard form (the variant images are inserted into the existing footage in this case). A deleted scene which further complicates the relationship of Lewis, Fuller and Venna has also been made available. One can either view each piece of footage as a separate option, or select “More than One Joy Ride” from the menu. If the latter choice is made, a symbol appears on the screen during the film in progress when an alternate sequence is available:

pressing “Enter” at that point will take the viewer to said sequence. While most will agree that the ending in the final cut was certainly the most correct and effective choice, the gesture made here is an overwhelmingly generous one.

In addition to the audio options of 5.1 Dolby Surround (a shattering, English only mix) and 2.0 Dolby Surround in English and French (both do quite well by Marco Beltrami's eerie score and the country-western tunes heard throughout), three separate audio commentary tracks are provided. Director Dahl goes solo on the first—starting his talk by ridiculing the art of audio commentary itself and apologizing for the sound made by the water he's pouring (“sounds like I'm urinating”). Still, he goes on to tell quite a bit about himself (he was originally destined to become a psychiatrist); the difference between directing his own scripts and those of others; and, of course, the specifics of casting and directing **JOY RIDE**. Writers Tarver and Abrams (who had a great deal of on-set influence) share the most consistently interesting track. They discuss their original script, their relationship with Dahl, Tarver's rain-drenched cameo as the silhouette of Rusty Nail, small details like the computer-generated removal of a real phone number from a pay phone, as well as the seemingly endless reshoots. The third track is shared by Zahn and Sobieski (separately recorded). Sobieski starts, speaking through her brief appearance early in the film; Zahn takes over until approximately the 48m mark; then Sobieski returns for the rest of the film. Though they do provide some interesting details

(especially about things that ultimately didn't take place in the movie), their casual style can be a chore to listen to. "Okay, he's buying a car," says Zahn, "...now he's driving REALLY FAST!" while Sobieski is given to free-association and, like, finding things, you know, "so cool." (The DVD opens with a disclaimer that "the opinions expressed in the commentary, etc. etc.")

Auditions for the voice of Rusty Nail can be heard over a specific clip from the film: the stylings of Eric Roberts and Stephen Shellen can be compared to those of eventual winner Levine. A "making of" featurette is typical TV filler; the theatrical trailer is also provided. **JOY RIDE** looks ravishing in anamorphic 2:35:1, with the crucial deep blacks of the nighttime highways unaffected by any authoring problems. The alternate footage has an understandably unfinished look to it by comparison; nevertheless, it's fully scored and well above the usual "workprint" quality found in such supplements. In all, this buried treasure of 2001 is one of the most worthwhile video acquisitions of the past year. —Shane M. Dallmann

JUNGLE HOLOCAUST

Ultimo mondo cannibale
"Last Cannibal World"
 aka **THE LAST SURVIVOR**,
CANNIBAL
 1977, Shriek Show,
 DD-2.0/MA/16:9/LB/+,
 \$24.99, 88m 1s, DVD-1

Although Umberto Lenzi had been there first with 1973's **Il paese del sesso selvaggio** (released in the US by Joseph Brenner in June 1973 as **MAN FROM DEEP RIVER** and again in January 1980 as **SACRIFICE**),

Ruggero Deodato tried his own hand at Cannibalism Italian Style four years later with **Ultimo mondo cannibale**, released in the United States by American International Pictures in March 1978 as **THE LAST SURVIVOR**, and rechristened **JUNGLE HOLOCAUST** for its Video City VHS release in the 1980s. Reworking familiar narrative conceits of a white man hunted and humbled by stone age aborigines (à la **THE NAKED PREY**), his grueling trial-by-ordeal (recalling the Sun Vow suspension ceremony of both **A MAN CALLED HORSE** and its first sequel—copied yet again by Umberto Lenzi for **CANNIBAL FEROX**) and eventual escape in the company of a comely native helpmeet (echoing the Heston-Harrison union of **PLANET OF THE APES**), **JUNGLE HOLOCAUST** is the most old fashioned and enjoyable of the notoriously unpleasant Italian cannibal films.

Scouring Southeast Asia for petrochemical reserves, big oil frontman Robert Harper (Massimo Foschi) returns by plane to his base camp on the Philippine island of Mindanao in the company of anthropologist Ralph (Ivan Rassimov) and two others. Finding the camp deserted, the team huddles inside the plane through the first edgy night, during which one of Harper's companions disappears into the jungle. The next morning, the pilot is impaled by a jungle mantrap and the remains of the missing woman are discovered being devoured by a tribe of throwbacks—forcing the Americans flee from "the last cannibals left in the world." Separated from the more experienced Ralph, Robert falls captive to a mountain tribe, who torture and cage him so that he may be fattened for crocodile bait. Breaking free, Harper abducts a tribal

woman (Burmese actress Me Me Lai) and the two brave the jungle and the anger of their pursuers in a desperate bid to make it to the airstrip alive.

Drawing its inspiration from the Hollywood model, **JUNGLE HOLOCAUST** follows a solid three-act story arc that lends structure to its parade of gross-outs. Massimo Foschi's fully committed and literally naked performance (**CAST AWAY** director Robert Zemeckis probably gave very little consideration to the possibility of having Tom Hanks' genitals patted by curious bareasses) affords the film a bracing first-person perspective and a sense of momentum denied most cannibal shockers, content as they are to merely follow their protagonists through the bush from one gory setpiece to the next. His devilish good looks softened by a beard and spectacles, Ivan Rassimov plays against type as the bookish Ralph, who evinces a humanity forfeited by Foschi's ugly American. What's interesting about the script (Spaghetti Western expert Tito Carpi and frequent Lucio Fulci collaborator Gianfranco Clerici fleshed out a treatment by producer Giorgio Carlo Rossi and Renzo Genta) is that Ralph's eco-savvy proves as useless as Harper's hubris; in the end, the jungle thwarts Ralph's expectations (a betrayal symbolized by his rotting leg), while Harper is able to add new flesh to the stripped bones of his preconceptions—and survive. With most entries in this subgenre denouncing the white man as soulless and deserving the fate of being passed through the lower intestine of some anthropophagous snaggletooth, Deodato and his scenarists actually come close to prescribing



Massimo Foschi is about to sacrifice his skivvies to the curiosity of his cannibal hosts in Ruggero Deodato's JUNGLE HOLOCAUST.

a treatment for the societal illness they diagnose.

JUNGLE HOLOCAUST would not fit the Italo-cannibal syllabus without the inclusion of animal slaughter footage, and there are several scenes guaranteed to upset stomach and conscience. A python has its skull bashed in, an alligator is dissected alive down to its still-beating heart, a bat is squeezed to death (to the aural accompaniment of its own breaking bones) in the coils of a snake, a monitor lizard regurgitates its last opponent (one of many sickening sidebars shanghaied for service in Lenzi's **EATEN ALIVE!**), to name but a few. The faked cannibal atrocities are just as unpalatable: a native youth has his forearm gnawed down to bone by fire ants, a cannibal chief has his liver cut out and eaten, a woman is beheaded and her visceral compartment opened up like a carpet bag and turned into a makeshift brazier (another bit of business borrowed for **EATEN ALIVE!**). As an audience

endurance test, **JUNGLE HOLOCAUST** has nothing on Deodato's later **CANNIBAL HOLOCAUST** (1979), but it's still not for the squeamish. Taking the edge off a bit is some excellent roving camerawork by Marcello Masciocchi, who had previously lensed such seminal *gialli* as Elio Scardamaglia's **THE MURDER CLINIC** [*La lama nel corpo*, 1966] and Romolo Guerrieri's **THE SWEET BODY OF DEBORAH** [*Il dolce corpo di Deborah*, 1967]. The score by Ubaldo Continiello (who would score assistant director Lamberto Bava's first feature film, **MACABRE** in 1980) is effective in its understated use of shivering strings.

Ultimo mondo cannibale has been widely available on VHS in various edits, both legitimately and on the gray market, under such alternate titles as **CANNIBAL**, **THE LAST SURVIVOR** and **JUNGLE HOLOCAUST** (to cash in the infamy surrounding Deodato's **CANNIBAL HOLOCAUST**)—it is under this misnomer that Shriek

Show hawks its DVD. Bearing the onscreen title **LAST CANNIBAL WORLD**, the film looks reasonably sharp, with no appreciable grain. Although the disc has drawn fire on various Internet discussion boards for looking less than "remastered anamorphic," anyone who first saw the film via an edited, pan&scan VHS transfer or a third-generation bootleg tape will appreciate this uncut, widescreen, English language transfer. The 2.35:1 framing does wonders for making the film seem less grimy, particularly in the sequence of Harper's examination by his native captors (one wonders if the hoisting of Harper on a tether to see if he can fly had any influence on the Barter Town bungee battle of **MAD MAX BEYOND THUNDERDOME**). While the chromatics are a bit less than vivid and the black levels not as deep as they should be, the image is clean and the monaural sound is perfectly acceptable. The disc has been given 24 chapters, and a man-eating motif dominates the menu

screens, with each successive option revealed through a series of jagged bites.

Extras on this disc include a 2m 47 video introduction in Italian (with subtitles) by director Ruggero Deodato, a 4m 59s slide show of production materials that includes one-sheet and insert art (one finds the film billed as **CANNIBAL** on a double feature with Ray Danton's **PSYCHIC KILLER**), lobby cards and video slipcase covers. Kit Gavin and Mike Baronas contribute video interviews with stars Massimo Foschi (20m 9s) and Ivan Rassimov (6m 37s). Gray-haired but looking fit, Foschi speaks in halting English of his month in the jungle working for the at times over-enthusiastic Deodato (whose direction to an extra to strike Foschi in the head resulted in a gash requiring more than thirty stitches) and of having to eat a sheep's liver left in the sun for four days ("A lot of beer after"). More comfortable with English, Ivan Rassimov notes that he and Foschi got their start in film with small roles in John Huston's **THE BIBLE**, and laments that he has not kept current with co-stars Foschi and Me-Me Lai ("Too many years, you know?"). Eight behind-the-scenes snapshots are offered, courtesy of Foschi's personal collection. A letterboxed theatrical (3m 41s) trailer bearing the **LAST CANNIBAL WORLD** title presents itself as making-of promo ("Go on George, get in closer to Deodato") of a "rare document" shot in a world "where cannibalism still exists" and relates the unfortunate loss of a native technician "with little chance of finding him in this infernal jungle."

Kit Gavin hosts Deodato for a director's commentary, presented in Italian with English

subtitles. (The film can also be played with its own soundtrack and the subtitles from Deodato's commentary, which is a nice touch.) Enjoying the film after not having seen it in ten years, Deodato claims to have based this purportedly true story on the 1961 disappearance of Michael Rockefeller (23 year-old son of billionaire New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller) in West Papua, New Guinea (now Irian Jaya). The soft spoken Deodato waxes nostalgic at the memory of having to build his entire production from scratch in Qualatanam (six miles from the nearest village) and of how his Malaysian jungle extras kept tearing off their long wigs because they thought Deodato was dressing them as women.

A director's filmography (which could have used one more proof-reading) credits Deodato with helming **HERCULES, PRISONER OF EVIL** (long attributed to Antonio Margheriti) and claims he is currently in production of **CANNIBAL HOLOCAUST 2**. Biographies of director and cast (which seem to have been translated by an Italian into English, and could have used more polishing) make the intriguing claims that Deodato was encouraged early on by family friend Roberto Rossellini, that Rassimov (born Ivan Djerassimovic to Croatian parents) is retired from acting but involved in the publication of *fotoromanzi* comic strips, and that Foschi enjoyed a side career revoicing American and English actors in films imported to Italy (including the voice of Darth Vader in **STAR WARS!**). There are trailers also for other Shriek Show presentations, consisting of full frame previews for Joe D'Amato's **BEYOND THE DARKNESS** (2m

55s), **NIGHTS OF TERROR** (aka **BURIAL GROUND**, 4m 4s), **ZOMBI HOLOCAUST** (3m 2s) and Umberto Lenzi's **EATEN ALIVE** (3m 30s). An especially nice bonus, one that you can hold in your hands (like, say, the throbbing liver of *il capo de tutti cannibale*), is a set of miniature reproduction lobby cards for the film under its German release title, **Mondo cannibale 2. Teil der Vogelmensch** ("Cannibal World 2: Tale of the Birdman"). —Richard Harland Smith

MONSTER A-GO GO / PSYCHED BY THE 4D WITCH

1965/1972, *Something Weird* Video, DD-1.0/+, \$19.99, 68m 37s/81m 18s, DVD-1

One unclassifiable oddity deserves another—hence this *Something Weird* DVD combination of two films with nothing in common in regards to genre, plot, creators or date. And while they do share an undeniable surrealistic effect, only one of them truly *tried* for it.

More people have heard about **MONSTER A-GO GO** than have actually seen it. In the late 1950s, future **GIANT SPIDER INVASION** creator Bill Rebane began work on a B&W sci-fi/monster movie with the working title of **TERROR AT HALFDAY**, which he co-scripted with Jeff Smith and Doc Stanford. Unfortunately for Rebane, the project was never completed; but in 1964, Herschell Gordon Lewis, needing an inexpensive co-feature for his hillbilly hootch musical **MOONSHINE MOUNTAIN**, arranged to acquire Rebane's stillborn footage. Via editing and narration, Lewis "completed" the film, gave himself producer and "extra dialogue" credit under his



If you expect MONSTER A-GO GO to deliver more shots of the "monster" (Henry Hite) than this, you'll be sorely disappointed. Come to think of it, you'll be sorely disappointed anyway!

customary "Sheldon Seymour" pseudonym and unleashed the results under the timely title **MONSTER A-GO GO**, which goes something like this...

The space capsule of astronaut Frank Douglas makes an unscheduled crash landing in a lonely Chicago field, but the astronaut himself is not so easily recovered. Unexplained cosmic forces have caused him to transform into a corroded, ten-foot giant (real-life sideshow giant "Henry Hite") who kills anyone he touches with bursts of lethal radiation. Dancing teens, unsuspecting sunbathers and a civilian-military science team (Phil Morton, June Travis, George Perry) on the case—all are threatened by the monster, whose "danger zone radius" threatens

to expand by as much as 50 miles! All the while, an offscreen narrator tells us what's going on, while providing profound insights such as "Fate and history never deal in 'ifs'." Rebane had successfully recorded enough actual dialogue to keep this from becoming as complete a "missing soundtrack" ordeal as **THE CREEPING TERROR** (including the remarkably explicit—for the time—outburst "What the hell do you want from me, Dr. Brant?"), but the same deadening effect prevails throughout, while the premise holds no special charm of its own. Alleged minor-league items such as **FIRST MAN INTO SPACE** demonstrate superior handling of the "astronaut becomes monster" theme, and that's even before one considers

THE QUATERMASS EXPERIMENT! But **MONSTER A-GO GO**, for all its theoretical entertainment value, defiantly manages to claim a slot for itself in the field by virtue of its finale, in which Lewis devises a mysterious "twist" as a smokescreen for the fact that the film actually has no ending whatsoever ("uncompleted" means *uncompleted!*). Southern drive-in audiences were left to chew on this as the drive-in double bill came to an end; the film received precious little (if any) theatrical play anywhere else, and didn't get much more attention when it resurfaced as an obscure home video release in the 1980s. The DVD edition gives us the film in the tatty-but-watchable condition one might expect. It's doubtful that anything

could be done to enhance the original cinematography, and the mono soundtrack presents no problems of its own.

Though specifically created as a supporting feature, **MONSTER A-GO GO** gets the top slot on this disc—perhaps for chronological reasons, but more likely because there's really nothing that can follow a film like **PSYCHED BY THE 4D WITCH**. Subtitled "A Tale of Demonology" on the title card, but advertised as "A Psychic Freakout From the Underground," this effort from writer/director Victor Luminera is basically designed to represent a non-stop LSD trip. The credits promise "A Host of Astral Demons," proclaim the miracle of "Transetheral Vision" and announce "This picture has a (R) rating." An actress billed only as "Margo" (not to be confused with the exotic star of 1943's **THE LEOPARD MAN**—as the Internet Movie Database does) plays narrator Cindy, a young curious teenager who learns that her ancestor Aunt Abigail was an authentic Salem witch. Through ritual experimentation, Cindy channels Aunt Abigail (the voice of "Esoterica"), who escorts her distant niece on a series of psychic sexual adventures (self-satisfaction followed by the comical conversion of a self-described "homo"). But when things turn a bit too kinky—and perhaps dangerous to Cindy's real-life friends—Cindy attempts to call things off. Abigail retaliates by possessing Cindy's brother Mark (a parapsychology student played by Tom Yeran), who takes over the narration as he's transformed into a "sex vampire" with huge dimestore teeth. The tale is told through a constant haze of swirling psychedelic colors, various "trippy" images (people on the street blazing with animated fire,



*One of several hundred leering, tripped-out images awaiting you in the unclassifiable **PSYCHED BY THE 4D WITCH**.*

a magazine cover featuring Anton LaVey eating a hamburger, etc.) and Johnny By The Way singing "Beware of the 4D Witch" on the soundtrack. One standout sequence, hilarious only in hindsight, has Cindy's intimate encounter with a live python set to the tune of Ravel's "Bolero". (It's hard to imagine Blake Edwards in the audience, but still...) This specialty production no doubt gave anyone attracted by the title or the ad campaign just what they were expecting... and it's quite unlikely that anyone else would have sought it out in the first place. But while this makes criticism essentially pointless, it's worth mentioning that, between the two films featured on this disc, the one that never meant to be surreal wound up that way—while the one intentionally designed along those lines ended up curiously straightforward!

The scratchy, grainy print of **PSYCHED BY THE 4D WITCH** on display here seems to have been mastered from a 16mm print as

projected onto a less-than-pristine screen (wrinkles are on view throughout the entire film). But while it may be impossible to determine the actual color scheme of such a deliberately skewed production, the palette on view seems reasonably vivid, and the mono soundtrack seems to have been adequately captured. One peculiar anomaly may not have been intended by the director, however—while the language in the first half of the film is quite explicit (Abigail invites Cindy on one "fantasy fuck" after another), the stronger words in the film's second half seem to have been spliced out in some sort of misguided experiment in censorship (nobody bothered to cut the nudity, after all). The world may never know the truth!

The days of "Play Movie" and "Select Chapter" apparently being over, SWV's DVD menu offers the choices "Shrivel Up" and "Find the Monster" for **MONSTER** (13 chapters) and "Freak Out" or "Discover the Plot" for **WITCH** (16 or 17 chapters,

depending on whether you go through the menu or not). As usual, SWV has provided plenty of supplemental material, though some of it will be quite familiar to the label's customers (for that matter, **PSYCHED BY THE 4D WITCH** was previously excerpted as a bonus featurette on Something Weird's DVD of (what else?) **SOMETHING WEIRD**. Three short subjects have been given new titles here. "Bedtime Booga Booga" (4m 50s) is another in SW's lineup of "Horror Home Productions" (and the only color short of the bunch). Here, a sleeping man is tormented by monsters before waking in a real, but no less comforting, world. The clip in which a nude female model is pursued by sentient "censor blobs" scrawled onto the film's surface (found at the tail end of countless Something Weird tapes) is offered here as "Psyched by the 2D Dot" (2m 16s). A mind-numbingly boring featurette in which a husband (vaguely resembling Woody Allen) and his associates use sex, drugs and monster masks to drive his (frequently nude) wife (Alice Noland) insane is sold as "Driving Miss Daisy Crazy" (36m 8s), but is in fact an lengthy excerpt from **AFTER THE BALL WAS OVER** (1969, available on VHS from SWV). There are plenty of entertaining trailers, as well—recognizable titles Jack Hill's **BLOOD BATH**, **FRANKENSTEIN MEETS THE SPACE MONSTER** and **MONSTER A-GO GO** itself mingle with such mind-boggling rarities as **BOURBON STREET SHADOWS**, **PSYCHOSISSIMO** and **TALES OF THE BIZARRE** (aka **SECRETS OF SEX**, from **HORROR HOSPITAL** creator Anthony Balch). Most amusing is the trailer for **EYES OF HELL**, which features both the repeated

exclamation "NEW!" and the disclaimer "formerly **THE MASK**." A radio-spot-accompanied Gallery of Exploitation Art is also included.

Want a "Way-Out Double Feature?" This disc certainly fits the bill, but be warned: "What you are about to see may not even be possible within the narrow limits of human understanding!" —Shane M. Dallmann

MOUNTAIN OF THE CANNIBAL GOD

La montagna del dio cannibale
1978, Anchor Bay Entertainment,
DD-2.0/16:9/LB/+, \$24.98,
102m 47s, DVD-0

SLAVE OF THE CANNIBAL GOD

1978, Diamond Entertainment,
D/LB/+, \$10, 94m 18s, DVD-0

Before there was a Euro-Cult *per se*, Sergio Martino's *La montagna del dio cannibale* (1978) was most notable in this country for the po-faced participation of its has-been Hollywood stars. Swiss-born Ursula Andress attained instant notoriety as the first Bond girl in **DR. NO** (1962), before graduating to a number of high-profile star turns (**SHE, THE 10TH VICTIM**, **CASINO ROYALE**); by 1978, the middle-aged actress' leading men were no longer Sean Connery and Marcello Mastroianni but Beau Bridges (**THE FIFTH MUSKETEER**) and Michael Sarrazin (**THE LOVES AND TIMES OF SCARAMOUCHE**). Second billing in an Italian gut-muncher surely held little appeal for American actor Stacy Keach, a Yale graduate and Fulbright scholar whose Broadway successes led to the title role in the revisionist Western **DOC** (1971) and plum parts in John Huston's **FAT CITY** (1972)

and the police drama **THE NEW CENTURIONS** (1972). Andress' career saw little in the way of improvement after this (despite playing Aphrodite in 1981's **CLASH OF THE TITANS**), but the '80s would see Keach achieving greater fame (as TV's **MIKE HAMMER**) and infamy (following a London bust for cocaine possession). The passage of twenty years makes it somewhat less depressing to look back at *La montagna del dio cannibale*, intended by director Martino as a nod to the exotic jungle adventures of old Hollywood, but enlivened by the whistles and bells of '70s permissiveness.

Made after Umberto Lenzi's *Il paese del sesso selvaggio* (US: **THE MAN FROM DEEP RIVER**, 1973) and Ruggero Deodato's *Ultimo mondo cannibale* (1977, aka **JUNGLE HOLOCAUST**) but before the holy trinity of Italo-anthropophagy christened with Deodato's **CANNIBAL HOLOCAUST** (1979) and consecrated by Lenzi's *Mangiati vivati* (US: **EATEN ALIVE**, 1980) and **CANNIBAL FEROX** (US: **MAKE THEM DIE SLOWLY**, 1981), *La montagna del dio cannibale* brings to the subcategory superior production values and the gawk factor of its slumming name cast.

The setup is pure **BRING 'EM BACK ALIVE**: Searching for her missing husband in the jungles of New Guinea, Susan Stevenson (Andress) and her excitable brother Arthur (**KEOMA**'s Antonio Marsina) retain the services of reclusive anthropologist Edward Foster (Keach, in an oily hairpiece) as their guide on a mission of rescue. Having previously survived an encounter with an atavistic cannibal tribe, Foster feels certain he knows where Stevenson was headed—to the



Ursula Andress as a woman deified by a tribe of flesh-eaters in Sergio Martino's MOUNTAIN OF THE CANNIBAL GOD.

island of Roka, whose sacred Ra-Rami mountain is protected not only by the flesh-eating tribesman, but by "some mysterious force" that safeguards "riches beyond imagination." With their native bearers either killed or scared off, the exhausted explorers find an unexpected ally in humanitarian doctor Manolo (Claudio Cassinelli, of **WHAT HAVE THEY DONE TO YOUR DAUGHTERS**), who tends their wounds at a jungle mission before leading them up the Mountain of the Cannibal God.

Those who revile Italian cannibal films for their animal cruelty will find plenty to shout about here: a lizard gutted, a monkey swallowed alive by a python, a crocodile and a lizard going *faccia a faccia* (and so on). The grisly legacy of the *mondo* movies of the '60s, which depicted shocking rituals from around the globe (mostly staged, but boasting real animal slaughter), these scenes disgust not just for their abject unpleasantness but because they contribute nothing to the narrative. It's easy to see why

Martino's investors requested this gnarly filler, as *Il montagna del dio cannibale* is sluggish, poorly scripted (by Martino and Cesare Frugoni, who later wrote Ruggero Deodato's **CUT AND RUN**) and blandly acted. Andress is asked to do little more than shriek and cower until the 70m mark—a long time to wait for very little payoff—while Stacy Keach is dropped off much too early. Only the charismatic Cassinelli makes an impression, managing to retain his dignity when mouthing the requisite *cannibali* catechism ("Animals only follow their instincts... Killing and eating. Man, too, has the same instincts..."). The standard jungle clichés are all trotted out: the superstitious bearers, crocodile and cobra attacks, the jungle mantrap, and the sexually unbridled native girls pleasuring their white male guests. To his credit, Martino coughs up a few original setpieces, which would be aped by (or in the case of Lenzi's **EATEN ALIVE**, spliced directly into) subsequent entries in Euro-cannibal canon.

Devotées of this type of film consider *Il montagna del dio cannibale* to be fair-to-middling, but tedium can be alleviated in the appreciation of the Techniscope cinematography of Giancarlo Ferrando (*I tutti colori nel buio* this ain't, but there are some striking setups), the moody score by Guido and Maurizio de Angelis, and a bizarre climax hell-bent on breaking several taboos in one sitting. Perceived as a goddess by the residents of Ra-Rami, Andress is stripped, body-painted, bedecked in ceremonial leatherwear (a floorshow copied by Andress' ex-husband John Derek in 1981's **TARZAN, THE APE MAN** and by Marino Girolami in **ZOMBIE HOLOCAUST**) while her minions wig out in a frenzy of non-missionary-style coitus and self-gratification. (While one horny Hottentot takes his pleasure from rear-entering a hog, a hot 'n bothered aboriginess tears off her loincloth to finger a pubic patch trimmed neater than the 18th green at Augusta. Cut from most prints, this

psycho-sexual setpiece is certainly... something.) On a less salacious note, Italian *giallo* enthusiasts will enjoy seeing actor Franco Fantasia (who also turns up in **EATEN ALIVE**, albeit in original footage) as an indignant mission priest and perennial walk-on Tom Felleghy (aka Tomasso Felleghi) as Ursula Andress' long-lost husband (seen only in a photograph).

Released in the United States in April 1979 by New Line Cinema as **SLAVE OF THE CANNIBAL GOD**, the film was cut down to 85m, the length of the later VHS transfer from Wizard Video. Slightly longer versions appeared on video labels around the globe (the film was one of the titles censored under the United Kingdom's "Video Nasties" legislation during the early '80s), but none presented the film at its intended length. Anchor Bay Entertainment has restored *Il montagna del dio cannibale* to its original running time for this wide-screen DVD featuring the English dub **MOUNTAIN OF THE CANNIBAL GOD** (the onscreen title is actually **THE MOUNTAIN OF THE**

CANNIBAL GOD). Letterboxed at 2.35:1, the feature looks exceedingly fine, with a sharp image, robust skin tones and lush jungle hues. Nights scenes and interiors are grain-free, with satisfying contrasts and deep blacks. The mono sound is adequate, but the effects and music track seems to be mixed higher than the dialogue track (Andress' accent causes some of her lines to pass a little too *sotto voce* for complete comprehension).

In addition to an All-Region DVD of the film currently available from Holland's EC Entertainment (who previously released decent NTSC DVD transfers of **CANNIBAL HOLOCAUST**, **EATEN ALIVE** and **CANNIBAL FEROX**), another domestic disc is available at a considerable discount—and for good reason. Running about 8m shorter and bearing the American release title **SLAVE OF THE CANNIBAL GOD** (the video burn title is **THE SLAVE OF THE CANNIBAL GOD**), Diamond Entertainment's time-compressed DVD is letterboxed (if not quite so generously), with a reasonable color palette (the

image is at times over-bright and flesh tones incline towards pink) and somewhat better-mixed (but tinier) sound. This version is missing the castration scene and all of the orgy particulars, although the animal violence—wouldn't you know it?—is intact. The keeppcase cover utilizes New Line's original poster art. There are 9 chapter marks, but only the first 4 can be accessed from the disc's main menu. Extras are limited to thumbnail bios distinctive for their term paper vagueness: Martino is dubbed a "prominent director," while Andress is celebrated as "a Classic Statuesque Beauty!" and Keach as "a very talented stage and screen actor." The disc also features plugs for other cut-price titles in the Diamond Entertainment catalogue.

If owning the definitive presentation of *La montagna del dio cannibale* is not sufficient inducement to pop for Anchor Bay's disc, keep reading. ABE has afforded the disc an impressive 27 chapters, which are listed on the back of a 4-page insert bearing the likeness of the film's Italian poster art (also used for

As bad as he looks, this actor was luckier than the animal cast members of MOUNTAIN OF THE CANNIBAL GOD.



the disc's Alphapak illustration). Comprehensive liner notes are by Mark Wickum, author also of more informative talent bios (with Jay Marks and Avie Hearn) of Sergio Martino, Ursula Andress and Stacy Keach. Pity there is no bio for the late Claudio Cassinelli, who died in a helicopter crash in Arizona in 1985 while acting in another film for director Martino. That unpleasant subject is only one of several topics broached in "Legacy of the Cannibal God" (12m 58s), an exclusive interview with Martino courtesy of William Lustig's Blue Underground Films. Speaking warmly of Cassinelli (and of the actor's co-stars), Martino waxes philosophical about cinema's mirage of eternal youth and tries to put a positive spin on this film's *mondo* condescensions. As is becoming their habit, the featurette's executive producers Lustig and Jay Douglas intercut the filmmaker's comments with contradictory footage from the film in question (in this case, the slow death of the monkey in the coils of the snake). Martino (an otherwise genial and even avuncular man) comes off the worse for this exchange, and perhaps that is his comeuppance—but Blue Underground should reconsider playing at 60 MINUTES and possibly alienating other Italian filmmakers who might think twice about how their comments are going to be re-edited back in the States.

Extras on this disc also include a gallery of production stills, on-set candids, lobby cards, and poster art, plus a 3m 52s letterboxed trailer distinguished by footage not seen in the film—particularly the alternate take of Stacy Keach's immortal line "You don't forget the taste of human flesh." —Richard Harland Smith

THE RAPE OF THE VAMPIRE

Le Viol du Vampire

1968, Redemption/Image Entertainment, DD-1.0/LB/ST/+, \$24.99, 90m 41s, DVD-0

The first film of French *auteur* Jean Rollin certainly put the young director on the map—by sparking a near-riot at its premiere. Vampiric themes and explorations of the surreal would become essential to Rollin's style as his career continued, but here—as Rollin himself would be the first to acknowledge—the truly bizarre elements came about as the result of an immediate need to expand a short subject into a full-length feature, which doesn't make it any less interesting.

THE RAPE OF THE VAMPIRE—the film forfeits its titular alliteration, and its vagaries, in translation—is announced on screen as "A Melodrama in Two Parts." The first part (approximately the first half-hour) consists of Rollin's original short, which begins as a blind (and soon topless) woman in a cellar is told "You must listen!" by a stern male voice. Gradually, we learn that the woman is one of four sisters in a French château, and that their landlord somehow knows that three strangers are due to arrive on the scene—potentially threatening their insular way of life. Sure enough, without explanation, three contemporary Parisians—Marc (a doctor), Thomas and Brigitte—appear at the château. They're aware of the reputations of the four "vampire" sisters, but (though they disagree on the proper therapeutic approach) they don't believe in actual vampires any more than they believe that the blind sister is truly blind. But it's crucial to

the landowner that the vampires continue to believe in themselves (and for others to believe in them); so with the help of his servant Matthieu—and the cooperation of the easily persuaded local villagers—he mounts an offensive against the intruders.

This combination of sex, blood, psychology and violence (including some fencing) remains potent and intriguing on its own. While one is still left to wonder just who the visitors are and what brings them to the château in the first place, the characters themselves are well-drawn and detailed, as are their relationships with each other and with the sisters. There's every reason to suspect that the "curse" is maintained via delusion and manipulation; a genuine breakthrough seems imminent as we learn of the blind woman's past mistreatment at the hands of the villagers, while the behavior of the landlord appears to be that of a resourceful lunatic. The "moment of truth," coinciding as it does with an outbreak of mob violence, succeeds in creating suspense and tension. As an independent short film, *Le Viol du Vampire* would most likely have sparked a much more positive reaction than it did after its expansion. But expand it did...

Part Two, "The Vampire Women," begins at 31m 24s with its own set of opening credits. While some sources (including the cover notes on Redemption's DVD) suggest that the characters who died at the end of Part One return to life "inexplicably," they are actually revived via ritual. Said ritual is performed by the servants of the Queen of the Vampires (light-skinned black actress Jacqueline Sieger, the only performer matched to his or her character in the credits)



A victim of the Queen of the Undead in Jean Rollin's volatily received B&W debut, *THE RAPE OF THE VAMPIRES*.

who emerge from the sea with the private carriage that holds their ruler. The (reasonably) controlled narrative of Part One is then officially abandoned with the abrupt, half-hearted capture and summary execution of the villainous landlord. Any attempt to describe the film from this point on is doomed to futility, but the rapidly changing imagery demands attention nonetheless. The rampant nudity and blood-letting continue, but now we're in the company of the Queen and her court (some of her followers are doctors, others are hippies) as well as that of the original players. Some characters are trying to develop a practical antidote for vampirism, while others participate in a car chase—a well-shot one, at that, with an impressive stunt involved. We move from the beach to a modern-day hospital—and from there to an actual

theater, where an elaborate, prop-laden climax is “staged.” And in one gruesome highlight, which predicts similar moments in **LET SLEEPING CORPSES LIE** and **DAY OF THE DEAD**, a female subject must be coaxed to rise from her morgue table—fresh from her autopsy. There's no secret meaning to unravel—no way to get the whole thing (which ends without so much as a single credit) to make linear sense. Under pressure to complete a feature, Rollin combined as much exploitable and eye-catching material as he could quickly conceive—and while the premiere audience in Paris reacted by yelling and throwing things at the screen, today's viewers (particularly those who would seek this title out in the first place) should quite enjoy the ride.

Redemption's print, mastered from Rollin's own 35mm

materials and letterboxed at 1:61:1, contains noticeable grain and scratchiness throughout, but this only becomes disruptive for a short while at the 80m mark. The B&W imagery (given the full Dolby Video Noise Reduction treatment) remains quite watchable, with acceptable contrasts, and the French-language mono soundtrack is problem-free. Optional English subtitles are provided, and the feature has been assigned 16 chapters (6 for Part One, 10 for Part Two). Video supplements include an extremely ratty French trailer (4m 22s) and a 30-item step-through gallery of still photos and promotional material (some of which can be seen on the insert and on the back of the case. As usual, Redemption's cover image has nothing to do with the feature—here, “viol” seems to have been confused

with "veil"). Marc Morris supplies the brief but informative insert notes, rounding out a package that Rollin *aficionados* owe it to themselves to check out. Others will require a sense of adventure and good sportsmanship. —Shane M. Dallmann

SADISTIC CITY/TABOO

Maohgai/Taboo

1993/1997, Tai Seng Video
Marketing, DD-2.0/MA/ST,
\$24.95, 87m 44s/91m 1s, DVD-0

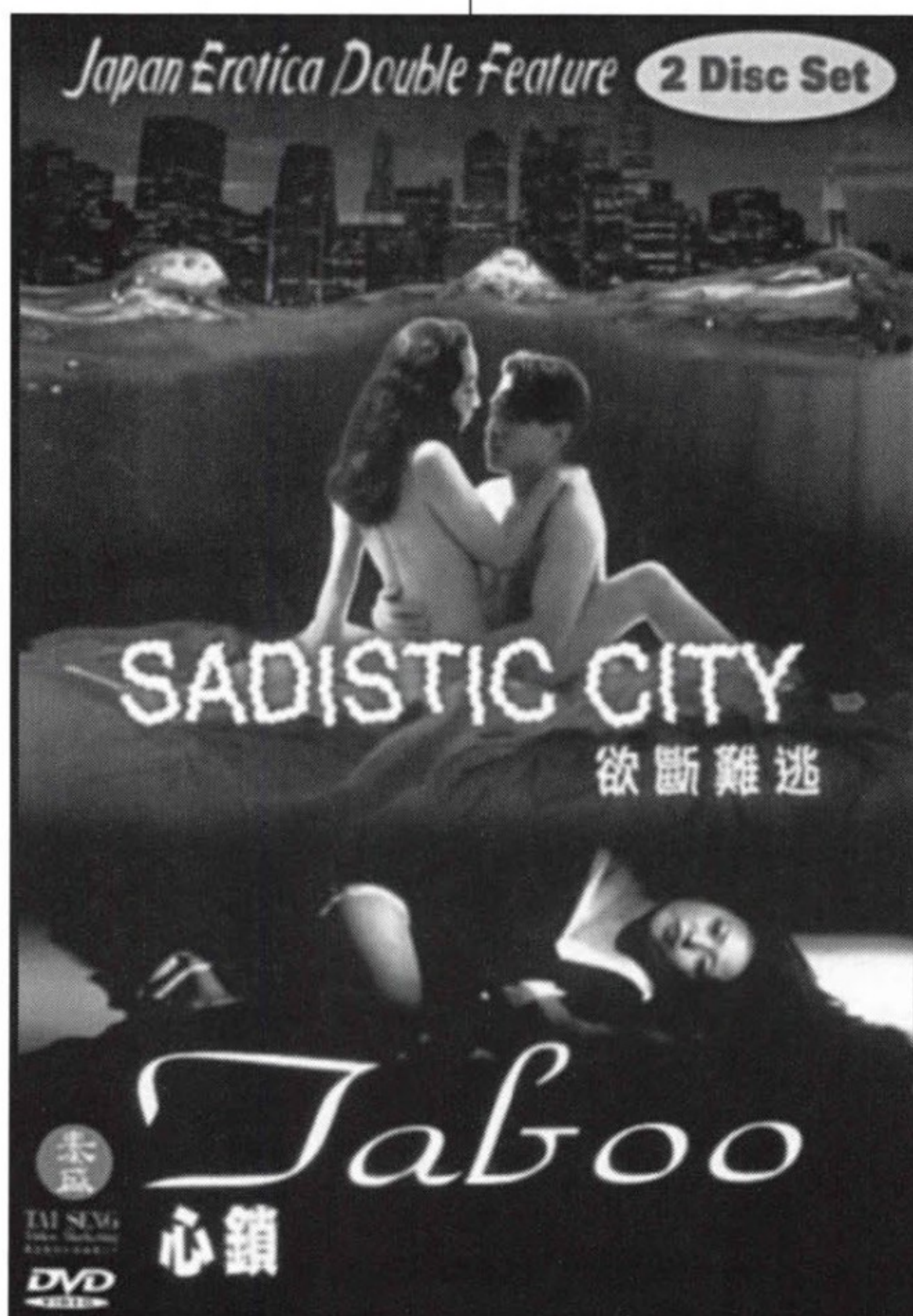
Tai Seng has followed up their triple disc "EROTICA JAPAN" set with this "JAPAN EROTICA" pairing of two Nikkatsu AV features. **SADISTIC CITY** tells of old school friends Kishi and Daimon, who are reunited after losing touch for twenty years. The pair enjoy a few drinks one evening, with Daimon then offering Kishi the sexual services of his lover, Yoshi. Kishi takes a liking to a 22 year-old secretary in his office and is soon seeing her, while also enjoying another dalliance with Yoshi. The friends shared some dark experiences in their past (including a rape) but Kishi has no trouble accepting this arrangement that Daimon has granted him. However, things take a dark turn when Daimon demands that he be given equal time with his friend's new partner. Kishi refuses and callously offers his long-neglected wife instead. When Daimon proceeds take him up on the offer, Kishi finds himself unsure of his next move.

A change of pace from the other Nikkatsu AVs we have seen, **SADISTIC CITY** is too slow and oblique for those in search of cheap thrills; there are a different set of goals here. As per studio requirements, director Ryuichi Hiroki (**I AM AN S+M WRITER**) inserts periodic erotic content but, despite what is implied by the

title, the sex here is comparatively mild, with only a smattering of kink. It is obvious that Hiroki was more interested in crafting an adult character study, a way of illustrating how people use each other as tools in pursuit of their own gratification. An edgy score by New York *avant garde* composer John Zorn helps to set an appropriately off-kilter mood, allowing the director to experiment with the narrative in different ways (like introducing a teenage version of Kishi to interact with his adult counterpart). While the film's accomplishments are ultimately modest, the fact that it at least tries to offer fully adult characters *and* explore their psychology help to explain why Nikkatsu's movies continue to

engage viewers. Akino Sakurako, Tomorrow Taguchi, and Rie Kondo star.

In **TABOO**, businessman Kiriu is presented with a strange proposition by his terminally ill friend, Hiramatsu. The latter has always known of Kiriu's attraction to his wife, Miki, and tells him that he has no problem if the two should end up together. However, Hiramatsu attaches one condition to his offer: Kiriu and Miki must make love in front of his coffin on the day of the funeral. Kiriu laughs off the statement as drunken rambling but, when Hiramatsu passes away sometime later, Kiriu decides that he is ready to act on his friend's offer. Flashbacks reveal that Kiriu was allowed to spy on



Hiramatsu and Miki while they were making love, just one of the enticements Hiramatsu used to heighten his buddy's interest in the woman. This manoeuvring was done to indulge Hiramatsu's increasing perversity, with that aforementioned final wish (also included in his will) the icing on the cake. Unfortunately, for Kiriu, he has misjudged Miki's loyalty to her dead lover.

TABOO suffers from an over-use of familiar classical music and director Yutaka Kohira accelerates some of the sex scenes for effect, evidently forgetting that, with videotape, this sort of manipulation does not work. Regardless, the film remains interesting in that it never tries to make any of the protagonists likeable or even sympathetic. The men are repulsive boors, while Miki's sexual hang-ups (supposedly the result of an affair she had with a high school teacher 20 years her senior) prevent her from carrying on anything approaching a healthy relationship. The absence of any compassionate or identifiable character and frequent detours into high melodrama will derail the film for some, but those more experienced with Japanese cinema are likely to recognize the dark psycho-sexual territory Kohira is exploring and respond somewhat more favorably. The eroticism here is plentiful but, given the set-ups, it is questionable how arousing these sequences will be for the majority of viewers. Noriko Hamada, Eisaku Shindo, and Yoji Matsuzaki star.

SADISTIC CITY was shot on 16mm and the fullscreen image looks very soft, grainy, and hazy. Blacks are consistently light and contrasts are weak. How much of this is due to the limitations of the gauge or Nikkatsu's video

transfer is unclear, but the cinematography and lighting are generally quite competent, with particularly interesting use of color. The sound is satisfactory. As mentioned above, **TABOO** was produced on video and then processed, *a la* Filmlook. The image is soft but colors and contrasts are adequate, as is the sound. English subtitle translation is poor on both features, though the storylines are not seriously impeded. Each film is presented on a separate platter with permanent English and Traditional Chinese subtitles and Japanese, Cantonese, and Mandarin language options. The Chinese versions utilize different (and, in the case of **SADISTIC CITY**, decidedly inferior) music. Tai Seng also offers each feature on VHS for \$19.95 apiece but only in the Cantonese and Mandarin dubs. —John Charles

THE SARAGOSSA MANUSCRIPT

Rękopis znaleziony w Saragossie

1965, Image Entertainment, DD-1.0/16:9/LB/ST/+, \$24.99, 180m 2s, DVD-1

In prefacing his 1940 Spanish Civil War novel FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS with a quote from 17th Century English poet John Donne ("...any mans *death* diminishes *me*, because I am involved in *Mankinde*; And therefore never send to know for whom the *bell* tolls; It tolls for *thee*"), American writer Ernest Hemingway hinted at his theme of the universality of duty and sacrifice among people of honor. A similar sentiment informs THE SARAGOSSA MANUSCRIPT, the picaresque novel by Count Jan Potocki (1761-1815), first published (in part) in Russia in 1804.

Written by a Pole in French and concerned with an Austrian captain's supernatural experiences in Spain while traveling to a military appointment in Madrid, THE SARAGOSSA MANUSCRIPT (also known as THE MANUSCRIPT FOUND IN SARAGOSSA) is half quixotic rite of passage and half Gothic mystery (Potocki patterned his story after the style of Ann Radcliffe, author of the seminal Gothic novel, THE MYSTERIES OF UDOLPHO) in addition to being a testament to the enduring belief that "...from one end of the world to the other, the story of Love is always the same."

Adapted by Tadeusz Kwiatkowski for director Wojciech Has, **THE SARAGOSSA MANUSCRIPT** employs the structure of its source novel, as a series of narrative frames through which the story of one man's life illuminates the lives of others. At the close of the Napoleonic Wars, a manuscript left behind in the looted Spanish town of Saragossa is discovered by the author's grandson. Eighty years earlier, Captain Alfons van Worden (Zbigniew Cybulski) had been *en route* to Madrid through the Sierra Morena mountains when fate obliged him to pass one night at the inn at Quemada. Coerced by a pair of Tunisian princesses (Iga Cembrzyńska, Joanna Jędryka) into drinking a strange potion, the bewildered van Worden awakens the next morning to find himself a target of the Inquisition. Spooked by a possessed goatherd (Franciszek Pieczka), Alfons befriends a cabalist (Adam Pawlikowski) and is entertained by a gypsy (Leon Niemczyk) with tales of his experience as a go-between for a jittery noble (Bogumil Kobiela) and his capricious mistress (Elzbieta Czyżewska). Mid-tale,



*At the end of the Napoleonic wars, a handwritten book opens a door to myriad tales of fantasy in **THE SARAGOSSA MANUSCRIPT**.*

the gypsy digresses to the sidebar stories of the noble's haunting by a friend killed in a duel and of a merchant's son (Krzysztof Litwin) with the misfortune to fall in love with the daughter of his father's enemy while being exploited by a manipulative rogue (Zdzisław Maklakiewicz). Are you getting all this?

Those who regard **PULP FICTION** as sophisticated storytelling may feel at sea with **THE SARAGOSSA MANUSCRIPT**, which pauses, interrupts, flashes back and reconnoiters repeatedly to the point of origin, at one point relating five flashbacks in one. Like Boccaccio's **DECAMERON** and **THE ARABIAN NIGHTS**, **THE SARAGOSSA MANUSCRIPT** is less about the tale than it is about the telling, proving yet again that the Devil is in the details. If Potocki channeled the ossuary vibe of his Gothic contemporaries, Wojciech Has and cinematographer Mieczysław Jahoda seem inspired by the charnel mindscapes of their

colleagues in Mexico (Miguel M. Delgado and Fernando Mendez, whose **El Vampiro** beat Hammer's **HORROR OF DRACULA** to the screen by a year) and Italy (principally, Mario Bava and Riccardo Freda, who collaborated around that time on **I vampiri**). The influence of Goya (who served his apprenticeship in Saragossa) is suggested by the iconic depiction of skulls, witches and hanged men (some interpretations of Potocki's novel associate the characters with figures from the Tarot) and in its insistence on punishment for the breaking of an oath, the film recalls Masaki Kobayashi's 1964 fright omnibus **KWAIDAN**. Also released that year was the British anthology **DR. TERROR'S HOUSE OF HORRORS**, which spawned a host of multi-part follow-ups (**TORTURE GARDEN**, **THE HOUSE THAT DRIPPED BLOOD**, **ASYLUM**)—none of which attempted even a fraction of the level of sophistication that

THE SARAGOSSA MANUSCRIPT has in spades.

THE SARAGOSSA MANUSCRIPT was released in Poland in 1965 at just slightly over 3 hours; shorn of half an hour, the film made its US debut in January of 1966, distributed by Amerpol Enterprise Films (who re-released the 155m version in April 1972). Despite the occasional Has retrospective, the film has lapsed into relative obscurity, with the filmmaker rarely receiving the attention heaped upon his countrymen Roman Polanski (whose first English language film was 1965's **RE-PULSION**), Janusz Majewski (**Lokis**, 1970), Walerian Borowczyk (**Docteur Jekyll et les Femmes**, 1981) or Andrzej Zulawski (**POSSESSION**, 1981). Image Entertainment, in conjunction with Jeck Film and Cowboy Pictures, sets that inequity to right with this restored wide-screen edition, transferred from the last surviving complete print,

owned by Wojciech Has (who died in October 2000 at the age of 75). The complete film had its US premiere at the 1997 New York Film Festival and was dedicated to Grateful Dead guitarist Jerry Garcia, a fan of the film who provided acquisition funds to the Pacific Film Archive prior to his death in 1995. (Martin Scorsese and Francis Ford Coppola later donated sufficient capital to preserve and restore the film to its intended length.) Image uses the original re-release poster art for its keeppcase packaging, which lends a decidedly Fillmore East aura to this Eastern Bloc fantasy.

Cinematographer Mieczyslaw Jahoda had worked with Dyalscope previously on Aleksander Ford's 3-hour medieval epic **Krzyzacy** [US: **THE KNIGHTS OF THE TEUTONIC ORDER**, 1960], and his command of the widescreen process is assured here. (Ford, a leading figure in post-war Polish cinema, had learned his craft in the Soviet Union, which may explain why **THE SARAGOSSA MANUSCRIPT** has the boundless aspect of Russian *fantastika*.) More knowing than merely clever and never condescending to gimmickry, Jahoda's B&W photography is startlingly clear on this Region 1 disc, with deep focus revealing intricate detail and a painterly expression of *mise en scène* (as much a credit to art director Jerzy Skarzynski). The positive print used for this anamorphic widescreen (1.92:1) transfer is near-immaculate, with conspicuous reel change marks but little in the way of frame damage. The Polish soundtrack is rendered in noiseless Dolby Digital mono, with optional yellow English subtitles. The disc's accompanying 8-page booklet offers liner notes by Darren Gross, a listing of the

disc's 44 chapters and a character roster that cites the chapters in which the characters appear. Short essays are dedicated to the pivotal characters of Alfons van Worden and the gypsy chief Avadoro (who share narrative duties in the film's two-part presentation) and Grateful Dead associate Alan Trist contributes a concluding remembrance about the film's impact on Jerry Garcia.

Extras are slight but appreciated. There is a gallery of 8 production stills (unfortunately, many of these are a touch overexposed and don't do the cinematographer justice) and biographies/filmographies for Wojciech Has, composer Krzysztof Penderecki (whose creepy compositions later turned up in both **THE EXORCIST** and **THE SHINING**), star Zbigniew Cybulski (the star of Andrzej Wajda's **ASHES AND DIAMONDS** [1958] was playing against type here, as a well-meaning bumbler rather than "the Polish James Dean") and support players Barbara Krafftówna and Elzbieta Czyzewska. Curiously, no mention is made of Czyzewska's subsequent emigration to the US or her appearance in such American films as Robert Downey's **PUTNEY SWOPE** or Costa-Gavras' **THE MUSIC BOX**, or that she was the inspiration for Yurek Bogayevicz's **ANNA** (1987), which starred Sally Kirkland as a Polish refugee unable to revive her acting career in New York. Strange that Leon Niemczyk (the sportswriter anti-hero of Polanski's **KNIFE IN THE WATER**) receives no biography, and it would be nice to learn something of gap-toothed actor Zdzislaw Maklakiewicz (who looks like the lovechild of Zero Mostel and Michael Caine), hysterical as

the mischievous Don Roque Busquéros.

Finally, Penderecki's first film score is honored with an isolated track of its own, which plays over the film *sans* dialogue or sound effects. Although the avant-garde composer quotes from Beethoven and waxes classical (befitting a film set for the most part in the 18th Century), this extra is a wonderful way to fully appreciate Penderecki's experimental use of electronic micro-tones to evoke a feeling of escalating dread. —Richard Harland Smith

STAGEFRIGHT

Deliria

aka **AQUARIUS, BLOODY BIRD**
1987, Anchor Bay Entertainment,
DD-5.1 & DD-2.0/SS/16:9/LB+/,
\$24.95, 90m 7s, DVD-0

THE CHURCH

La chiesa

1988, Anchor Bay Entertainment,
DD-5.1 & DD-2.0/SS/16:9/LB+/,
\$24.95, 101m 48s, DVD-0

Few in number, the films of Michele (pronounced "Mick-ay-lay") Soavi nevertheless exert an influence among Euro-Cult devotees for their wealth of eye-popping visuals and mind-bending narrative turns. A student of fine art turned protégé of Dario Argento and Aristide Massaccesi (aka Joe D'Amato), Soavi paid his cinema dues as a bit player in such shockers as Lucio Fulci's **CITY OF THE LIVING DEAD** [*Pauro nella Cita' dei Morti Vivanti*, 1980], D'Amato's **MONSTER HUNTER** [*Rosso sangue*, 1981], Lamberto Bava's **A BLADE IN THE DARK** [*La casa con la scala nel buio*, 1982] and **DEMONS** [*Demoni*, 1984] and Argento's **PHENOMENA** (1985). During this time, Soavi also served an



Serial killer Irving Wallace sits enthroned among his handiworks in the suspenseful climax of Michele Soavi's dazzling directorial debut, *STAGEFRIGHT*.

apprenticeship behind the camera as a scriptwriter (D'Amato's **ENDGAME**), second assistant director (Argento's **TENEBRE**, 1982), first AD, and special effects director (Argento's **OPERA**, 1987) before striking out on his own. In follow-up to their Dario Argento and Lucio Fulci Collections, Anchor Bay Entertainment has brought Michele Soavi's first two films to the digital marketplace as deluxe, widescreen DVDs that do justice indeed to Soavi's particular vision of Hell on earth.

A disarmingly overfamiliar tale of a dance troupe bedeviled by a psychopath, **STAGEFRIGHT** was dreamed up by **RABID DOGS** star Luigi Montefiori (aka George Eastman) and honors a cinematic tradition extending back to early Hollywood: both Universal's silent **PHANTOM OF THE OPERA** and **THE LAST WARNING** (along with their talking remakes and imitators) and Victory Pictures' **A FACE IN THE FOG** (1936) plumbed the

possibilities of victims trapped inside a theater for the fight of their lives. In 1974, Giuseppe Bennati revived the tradition with **THE KILLER RESERVED NINE SEATS** [*L'assassino ha riservato nove poltrone*], adding a supernatural element that was even more pronounced a decade later in Lamberto Bava's **DEMONS**, which shifted the shocks to a satanic *cinemathèque*. In **STAGEFRIGHT**, the makers of an "intellectual musical" are set upon by a homicidal (and presumably out-of-work) actor, the humorously-named Irving Wallace, recently escaped from a psychiatric clinic after carving up 16 victims. When his wardrobe mistress is dispatched with a pickaxe in the parking lot, impresario-*manqué* Peter Connors (David Brandon) hopes to exploit the murder for all its weight in free publicity, moving up their premiere and locking his lead actress Alicia Alvarez (Barbara Cupisti) and her costars inside the theater for an all-night

brush-up rehearsal. Unbeknownst to Connors, the killer has joined the production—and proceeds to winnow cast and crew down to the inevitable Final Girl.

For all it plunders from old dark house thrillers (ominous thunder, creaking doors, ironically-named black cats), seminal American slashers (panic inside a station wagon lashed by rain à la **HALLOWEEN**, a comfortless clinic as a wellspring for terror à la **HALLOWEEN II**, a tableau of arranged corpses à la **HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO ME**) and the Italian school (candied pools of light, bridal mannequins, and the misuse of a power drill), **STAGEFRIGHT** stands apart—as both a nod back and an irreverent look forward. Soavi embellishes the script's demand for prefab frights with personal touches, allowing **STAGEFRIGHT** to transcend its pretensions in the singularity of its slayings—several of which result not in sudden death but rather in lingering moments of

awful consciousness (a male orderly dying unnoticed in a room dimmed for sleep, a pretty dancer bleeding out in front of helpless onlookers). With too many copycat slashers hoping to distinguish themselves by the inventiveness of their violence, Soavi gets at what makes death truly horrible—the complete annihilation of personality and the ultimate separation from the living. He further defies slasher convention by staging most of his murders in the presence of others, in full bright light that should offer security—but doesn't.

Shot by Renato Fafuri (graduating here from the second unit on Argento's **OPERA**) with a color palette of comic book primaries, **STAGEFRIGHT** looks exceedingly fine on ABE's all region DVD. The 16:9 enhanced 1.83:1 letterboxing works wonders for appreciating Soavi's fetish for layering his frame with ordinary objects loaded with meaning (look out for that circa-1986 issue of *TIME* magazine heralding trouble brewing in Afghanistan). While some grain is appreciable, the image is vibrant and the contrasts are excellent (with bottomless black levels making the most of one character's chainsaw appendectomy). Anchor Bay offers the original two-channel English dub (prepared by dialogue coach and revoicing artist Sheila Goldberg, who appears in a small role as a fishy nurse) as well as a more intense Dolby Digital EX Surround (5.1) remix, which gooses the screams and fattens out the soundtrack by Simon Boswell without becoming overbearing. Extras are slight: a letterboxed theatrical trailer (2m 17s) and a concise biography of Soavi by Mark Wickum. Crest National has done a splendid job authoring this **STAGEFRIGHT** DVD and has

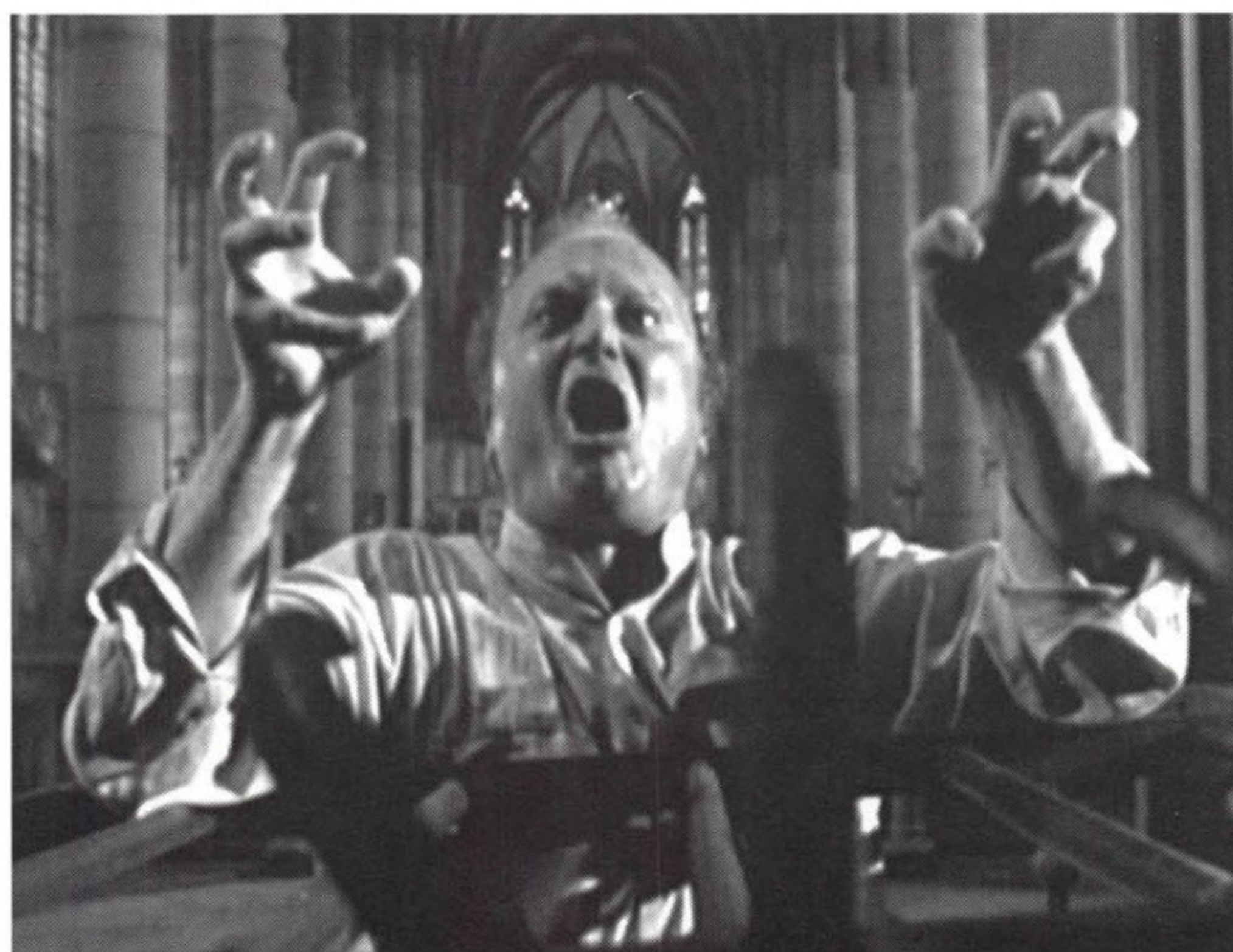
designed some fun menu pages, which take the form of the pages of a bloodstained issue of *PLAYBILL*.

Michele Soavi's second film, **THE CHURCH**, was conceived as the third installment of Lamberto Bava's proposed **DEMONS** trilogy, with incubi set to run amuck aboard an intercontinental air flight. When Bava allegedly proved an unpopular choice with investors, Argento turned to Soavi, who rewrote the original screenplay by Argento, Dardano Sacchetti (Fulci's **THE BEYOND**) and **DEMONS** scenarist Franco Ferrini to reflect his own esoteric interests in history and art and to honor Argento's pet conceit of modern Germany entering a new Middle Ages. Despite Soavi's rewrite, **THE CHURCH** fits the **DEMONS** curriculum, with the modern age troubled yet again by the resurrection of ancient evil. In a prologue set during the Crusades (a remnant of Sacchetti's screenplay), the Order of the Teutonic Knights slaughters a

village of suspected devil worshippers, burying them *en masse* and constructing a massive cathedral on-site to contain the demon hoard. A millennium later, restoration causes damage to the church's foundation, reopening a conduit to Hell. While the church's new librarian (Tomas Araña) and a restoration expert (Barbara Cupisti, by now the wife of Soavi) attempt to decipher the emanations from below, an aged Bishop (Feodor Chaliapin) destroys all documents related to the structure's built-in failsafe, which is set to destroy the church and all those locked within it rather than surrender its unholy secrets.

With a budget three-and-a-half times that of his first film, **THE CHURCH** afforded Soavi an expansive canvas on which to etch his big themes. Location work in Budapest and Hamburg is well-integrated with footage shot in Rome, where Renato Tafuri's restless camera tracks, prowls, creeps, and climbs

Unholy machinations take a collection of human lives in Michele Soavi's sophomore effort, THE CHURCH.



around an impressive mockup of the cathedral interior. With a bigger budget comes better actors: Tomas Araña (the lanky Lazarus of Martin Scorsese's **THE LAST TEMPTATION OF CHRIST**), Hugh Quarshie (seen recently in **STAR WARS-EPIISODE ONE: THE PHANTOM MENACE**) and the late Feodor Chaliapin (the infernal architect of Argento's **INFERNO**); Soavi is also well-served by the return of **STAGE-FRIGHT**'s Barbara Cupisti and Giovanni Lombardo Radice (aka John Morghen), along with Argento's daughter Asia, who made her film début in **DEMONS 2**. Given more creative freedom, Soavi indulges his penchant for recurring visual tropes, such as the water *leitmotif* that is reflected in the use of glass, mirrors, nail polish and ink. An undercurrent of nascent carnality pervades (the glistening vaginal "eye" of the Devil, the crack through which Lotte breaks curfew, and the Cathedral's "secret spot," with its threat of obliteration from a single touch), conceived by Soavi as a legacy of the cruel prurience of Medieval hellscapes that have provided his characters a common appetite for Judgment.

Despite the reach of his ambitions, Soavi fails ultimately to tie up his many plot threads, leaving the film a bit bipolar. The first half (which owes a considerable debt to English writer M. R. James) feels somber and intricately realized (the schism between the church's old and new orders is particularly promising), while the second is hyperbolic and cynical. When all Hell breaks loose at the halfway mark, the resulting *Götterdämmerung* feels by-the-numbers. One suspense setpiece—in which a man and woman tunnel out of the

besieged church only to emerge in the worst possible place—seems to have been lifted from Amando de Ossorio's Knights Templar vehicle **RETURN OF THE EVIL DEAD** [*El Ataque de los Muertos sin Ojos*, 1973]; to his credit, Soavi puts his own ironic mark on the gag, but his punchline seems at odds with the sobriety of the film's buildup. Aside from its manifest narrative inconsistencies (Araña unearths a brittle Medieval parchment that he proceeds to carry it around in his pocket as if it were a cocktail napkin), what cripples **THE CHURCH** most is an authorial diffidence about the origin of true evil: the Teutonic Knights (seen as ignorant and merciless), the Church (and its musty contention that "the world is the Devil's"), or modern society (which, despite the use of Philip Glass cues from Godfrey Reggio's **KOYAANISQATSI**, does not seem so terribly "out of balance"). As he did in **STAGEFRIGHT**, Soavi further stumbles by tacking on a sequel-begging coda that makes no sense given what we've just seen transpire. Better than its competition (certainly as late as 1988), **THE CHURCH** is good enough to have been much better—and Soavi's subsequent **THE DEVIL'S DAUGHTER** [*La setta*, 1990; reviewed VW 9:15] was a step in the right direction.

Anchor Bay's release of **THE CHURCH** utilizes the English dub supervised by Nick Alexander and sold previously on VHS by Southgate Entertainment [reviewed VW 4:14]. Letterboxed accurately at 1.85:1 (and also enhanced for 16:9 playback), there is more film grain apparent here, but the intentionally subdued colors are stable, the blacks are true, and

the image is otherwise sharp. The wider framing of this transfer allows more peripheral information to be glimpsed at the sides, such as the bent, cloaked figures that seem to worm their way into many shots, boosting their spookiness. Soundtrack options for **THE CHURCH** also consist of the original 2.0 mix and its Surround EX upgrade. A theatrical trailer (2m 4s) is included as a bonus, along with a repeat of Mark Wickum's Michele Soavi bio. Oddly, Anchor Bay has decided not to market a proper "Michele Soavi Collection," instead selling **THE CHURCH** as part of its Dario Argento line. —Richard Harland Smith

Imports

ANGEL DUST

Enjeru dasuto

1994, Panorama Entertainment
Platinum Classic #PCLDVD-
201101 (Hong Kong),
DD-5.1 & DD-2.0/MA/LB/ST,
\$17.99, 116m 59s, DVD-0

Every Monday at 6pm on the Yamanote subway line, a young woman is injected with a poison that induces respiratory failure and near instantaneous death. Assisting the police investigation is Dr. Setsuko Suma (**GODZILLA, MOTHRA AND KING GHIDORAH: GIANT MONSTERS ALL-OUT ATTACK**'s Kaho Minami), a specialist in the field of abnormal criminal psychology. She also possesses the ability to absorb the thoughts and emotions of killers, through close study of their victims or evidence related to the crimes. Dubbed "The Syringe Killer" by the newspapers, the perpetrator



*Investigator Kaho Minami tracks a serial killer
in Sogo Ishii's reality-bending thriller ANGEL DUST.*

may somehow be affiliated with a cult called The Ultimate Truth Church, which is known to brainwash its members. Heading up the “re-brainwashing” facility that treats former UTC members is Setsuko’s ex-lover, Dr. Rei Aku (**RING 0**’s Takeshi Wakamatsu), who offers her some cryptic clues that lead Setsuko to suspect that he himself is the murderer. After a handful of subway victims, the killer goes a different route by choosing a woman from a nearby residential area. Setsuko uses her gifts to figure out who the next victim will be but the pressures of the case and the mind games Rei is playing begin to take a toll on both Setsuko and her marriage.

Unlike virtually every serial killer movie produced to date, **ANGEL DUST** has no graphic violence—not even a single drop of blood. In place of

explicit horror, director Sogo Ishii (**ELECTRIC DRAGON 80,000 V**) concentrates on atmosphere. Lingering shots of the neon filled Tokyo cityscape open the picture and there are similarly lengthy and serene sequences throughout. Ishii also includes long periods of silence, which are broken by sudden noises, unusual music, or increasingly strong ambient sounds. This is done not so much for shock effect but as a method of displacing the audience, which helps them identify with what Setsuko is undergoing (one of the concepts here is the idea of mental illness as a transferrable phenomenon). The director also utilizes unique visual compositions to heighten this “unreality” and impart subtle intimations (in one such instance, Setsuko views a series of quickly changing evidence slides, with the killer’s

perspective gradually becoming evident amidst the flickering images). The way Rei toys with Setsuko reminds one of the relationship between Jodie Foster and Anthony Hopkins in **THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS** but the addition of a backstory here heightens its effectiveness. That said, this is a challenging film that some viewers will find difficult to fathom. As one has come to expect from Japanese genre productions, not all of the pieces fit snugly together and the languorous pacing may serve to further alienate others. Etsushi Toyokawa (**THE 8 TOMB VILLAGE**) is memorable in a supporting role as Setsuko’s husband.

The packaging carries the Region 3 symbol but the DVD is actually all-region. Alas, this is a terrible looking release. The 1.70:1 image is intensely grainy

throughout with digital instability constantly evident in lighter areas of the screen. In fact, the presentation resembles a deck-to-deck VHS dub in which the sharpness control on the playback machine has been cranked up to "11." White dropouts of the sort found on half-inch tapes even pop up from time-to-time. Low light sequences lack detail and the removeable English subs are only fair, with some lines left untranslated. The Japanese language tracks are fairly effective, though they seem more like enhanced mono than a true stereo mix. Traditional Chinese subtitles are also included and a single page filmography (in English only, oddly enough) is the only extra. New Yorker Films has the US rights to the picture and issued it on VHS in 1998; that tape is still in print and retails for \$29.95. Unfortunately, the majority of New Yorker's DVDs thus far have been pretty mediocre, so there is little reason to expect a definitive NTSC all-region or Region 1 version hitting shelves anytime soon. Available from Poker Industries (see Sources). —John Charles

SAY YES

2001, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment #23185 (South Korea), DD-5.1/16:9/LB/ST/+, \$22.99, 103m 59s, DVD-0

Kim Jung-hyun (Kim Ju-hyuk) has just sold his first novel and, to celebrate, purchases a new car. He and wife Yoon-hee (**THE SOUL GUARDIANS'** Chu Sang-mi) decide to travel from Seoul into the countryside for a vacation but, following a brief rest stop, Jung-hyun accidentally collides with a pedestrian. The quiet, malevolent-looking man (**NOWHERE TO HIDE's** Park Joong-hoon) is not hurt but asks that he be allowed to join the



Chu Sang-mi (left) and Kim Ju-hyuk find their quiet vacation transformed into a fight for survival in the South Korean thriller SAY YES.

couple on their trip; the guilt-ridden Jung-hyun reluctantly agrees. A few minutes into the trip, the Rider (who does not reveal his name) states that he plans to kill the couple...but then claims he was merely joking. However, when a rock comes crashing through their hotel room window that evening, the mysterious man's threat becomes dangerously real. The Rider proceeds to involve the couple in a pair of automotive close calls, a way of provoking the writer into assaulting him in front of several witnesses. With Jung-hyun in police custody and facing prison time, The Rider offers another deal: he will drop the charges, if the pair allow him to accompany them for the next three days. With no other alternatives, they agree. Privately, The Rider informs Jung-hyun that he will continue to torment him and his wife until Jung-hyun finally has the courage to kill him. When that is not achieved, the madman decides to up the ante by taking the couple prisoner and

stating that he will brutally torture Jung-hyun until the latter finally begs him to take Yoon-hee's life.

As can be gleaned from that synopsis, **SAY YES** is essentially the South Korean answer to Robert Harmon's **THE HITCHER** (1986), blended with elements from **THE VANISHING** (1988) and **SE7EN** (1995). In the final third, we even get a bit of **THE TERMINATOR** (1984), with the emotionless (and now facially disfigured) villain trying to run down his target using a stolen transport truck. It can be argued that Rutger Hauer's antagonist in **THE HITCHER** possessed some kind of supernatural power that consistently let him gain the upper hand by doing things that were beyond the realm of possibility; Park Joong-hoon's killer never displays such abilities, but the storyline allows him to perform the same sort of feats and, after awhile, the lapses in logic become too numerous to forgive. There are also a few hoary clichés of an older vintage (like the small

town garage that has to send out for parts, causing a simple repair to take hours). While it is disheartening to see an Asian thriller so unweaned from Hollywood horror formula, **SAY YES** does succeed in one sense: director Kim Sung-hong is allowed to take the movie to the limit, unrestrained by the "R" rating **THE HITCHER** and **SE7EN** were obliged to obtain. As a result, the final act is intensely violent and unpleasant, thereby gifting a derivative and mostly ineffectual work with the sort of shocking climax that leaves viewers talking. While this does make **SAY YES** more potent as horror, it ultimately does little to make it a better movie.

The disc face and keep case packaging display the Region 3 symbol but the dual layer DVD is actually region free. Measuring out at 1.79:1, the anamorphic transfer looks terrific, with an extremely clean image, vivid hues, and deep blacks. Slight vertical jitter is apparent in a few spots, evidently a fault of the source material. Only the original sync sound Korean version is included and it is a suitably bombastic 5.1 mix with good shock effects (crashing thunder, shattering glass, squealing brakes, slamming doors, LOUD telephones, etc.) and a very nice sound field. Optional English and Korean subtitles can be called up and a slightly disruptive layer change occurs at 1:22:16.

Supplements (none of which are given English translation) include the theatrical trailer, brief interviews with the director and the three leads, a "Making Of..." program (22m 24s) consisting of behind-the-scenes footage, and cast/director profiles. Available from Poker Industries (see Sources). —John Charles

VISITOR Q

Bizita Q

2001, REM #DVD 2002, DD-2.0, \$29.95, 84m 6s, DVD-2 (PAL)

Takashi Miike's **VISITOR Q** is a family movie in just about every sense of the word. Just about. It's really a *broken* family movie and "Q" is the mysterious stranger who mends them, using some very Crazy glue. Miike is known for immersing his actors in rivers of blood but, in **VISITOR Q**, they're bathed in a more tender but no less primordial flood of Mother's Milk. Appropriate, because this film is a robustly perverse celebration of Family Values starring Mom as the literal wellspring of healing and unity. And the enigmatic title character? "Visitor Q" is a distant cousin to a score of similar characters from films like **IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE**, **SEVEN FACES OF DR. LAO** and **TEOREMA**—movies that feature mysterious, mystical samaritans who appear out of nowhere and exit, stage-left, back to Nowheresville. These inscrutable strangers are thinly-veiled mysteries. They're simply literary tropes: stand-ins for the moral conscience of the screenwriter, existing only to show us the error of our ways and point toward salvation. Traditionally, these movies end in a wet-eyed group hug, but in Miike's film, there isn't room for such familial sentiment. This corrupt clan is a dysfunctional family vaudeville act to whom incest, necrophilia and murder are the mundane distractions of daily life. Very funny distractions, too: both sordid and sunny, **VISITOR Q** peers into the abyss and busts out laughing. The film offers this family nothing like the simple solutions of **IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE**, but it

does acknowledge that life *is* wonderful: it's a self-help book for people who have already jumped.

The family in **VISITOR Q** is tightly-knit in one way; they are polar opposites to the air-brushed Norman Rockwell-ites of **FATHER KNOWS BEST**. Here, Father Knows Least, but he's itching to learn. Kenichi Endo plays the confused dad, Kiyoshi Yamazaki, who's producing a documentary that will reveal the "truth" about modern Japanese youth. He's at his wit's end when we first meet him, perhaps he's nervous because the prostitute he's hired as an afternoon delight is his own daughter. A typically unsatisfied teenager, Fujiko (Miki Yamazaki) is no less demanding away from home; she even complains about her father's premature ejaculation. This depraved encounter leaves Kiyoshi with a barrelful of conflicted emotions (the crack about his sexual prowess really hurt), yet he's inspired—ready to tackle his documentary by focusing on his own fractured family. Kiyoshi boards the train home, still sniffing his fingers, when "Visitor Q"—a bushy haired young man in a red floral shirt—reaches through the window and gives him a good whack upside the head with a rock. With that, Kiyoshi will be wearing a bandage on his head for the rest of the film, a shell-shocked soldier scrambling in the trenches of his own Family Feud. Kiyoshi's wife, Keiko (Shungiku Uchida), has her own domestic dilemma: her son Takuya (Jun Mutô) never tires of assaulting her: an abusive, junior-league Caliban, he canes his mother till welts rise on her back and throws her through the rice-paper walls of their home. The scars on Keiko's



Kinichi Endo stars as a deranged man, who decides to make a movie about what's wrong with young people today, in Takashi Miike's truly wild VISITOR Q.

back make a nice contrast to the tangled roadmap of needle tracks on her arms and legs; she's feeding a bad habit and turns tricks to stay high (and to keep that smile on her face).

Shungiku Uchida wears that pained, courteous smile through most of this movie, even during her most mortifying moments. It's only when she discovers the pleasures of lactation, while cuddling with "Q," that her smile turns truly joyful. And her sweet grin lifts the movie to a different level of pleasure. Uchida gives a moving performance that uses the most delicate inflections to transform her careworn face into a radiant repository of happiness (with her troubles, hysterics would be understandable, but she is too full of grace). This middle-aged actress runs a gauntlet of humiliation, yet manages, in the end, to emerge serenely triumphant. I'm tired of hearing about actresses praised for their "bravery," particularly when that kind of counterfeit courage usually means wearing

no mascara or appearing in a dress that costs less than \$5,000. So I hope my praise for Uchida is not drowned in these hyperbolic times; she gives a very brave and touching performance. The other actors all merge seamlessly within the fabric of Miike's crazy quilt. Like *THE SIMPSONS*, this family becomes more recognizable as ourselves as the jokes become more extreme. **VISITOR Q** knows us.

At first blush, **VISITOR Q** may seem designed simply for shock value. So what? For those who demand solemn rationales for outrageous shenanigans... relax. And be happy with art that doesn't try to make you a better person: **VISITOR Q** can be enjoyed solely on its own scandalous slapstick terms. For those who still insist: the dreadful debauchery can be seen as a bumpy road to a transcendent state of Family-hood. It's one way of saying we pay a terrible price, suffer Herculean labors, to find a happy home. It's not so far from the journey through

madness taken by Rojack, the fallen angel hero of Norman Mailer's *AN AMERICAN DREAM*, where violent sex and murder lead to higher level of consciousness, of purification and rebirth. Thankfully, **VISITOR Q** never overstates this serious stuff; it's a convulsively funny journey to self-knowledge, a pro-family film for the new Millennium.

A rowdy comedy with a serene current flowing beneath its roiling surface, **VISITOR Q**—like Miike's **AUCTION** [reviewed VW 86:46], is about a disintegrated family struggling to become whole. Miike is a peerless surveyor of this type of both intimate and extreme human comedy—a shockmeister with heart—and this film is a reminder of the pleasures of Luís Buñuel and Bertrand Blier, a movie whose grotesque imaginings are inseparable from its good will. Miike is happy to give us a happy ending; the family unites, safe in the literal bosom of their home.

A German company, REM, has released a PAL version of **VISITOR Q** in its original Japanese language with optional subtitles in English or German. Also included are a photo gallery, a biography of Miike, a filmography of the principal actors, an onscreen text interview with Miike, and trailers for his other films **AUCTION**, **DEAD OR ALIVE** and **WILD ZERO**. The image is fairly soft and suffers from coarse, slightly solarized banding in what should be velvety smooth shadows. The colors are rich in this full-screen presentation and, at times, near neon in their saturation. The sound mix is the strongest technical aspect of this disc, lending a vigorous sonic boom to each blow of **VISITOR Q**'s trusty rock.

VISITOR Q is available from Poker Industries (see Sources). —Charlie Largent



BIBLIO WATCHDOG

THE STRANGE CASE OF DR. MABUSE

By David Kalat
McFarland & Company, Inc.,
PO Box 611, Jefferson NC 28640
305 pp., \$49.95.

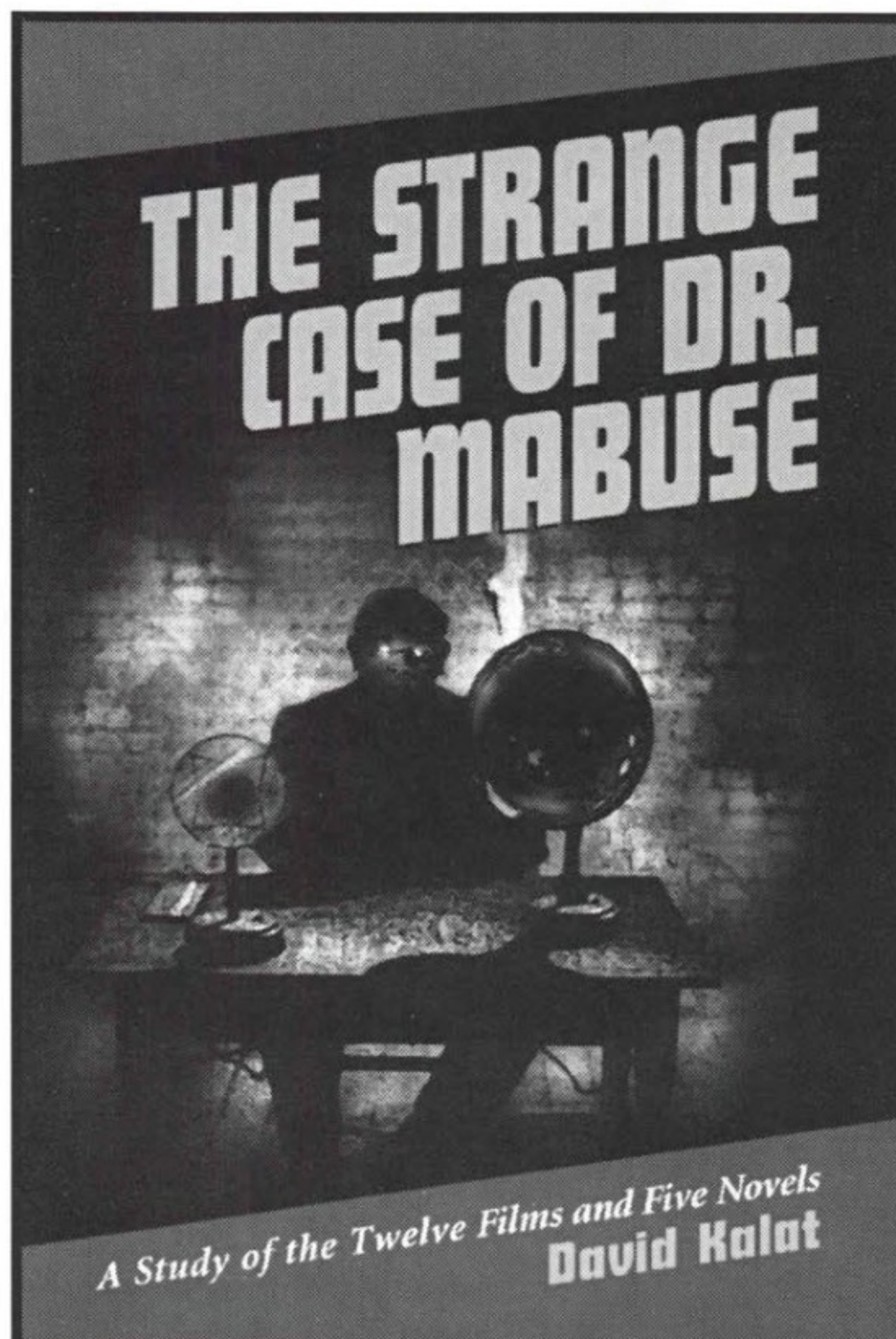
Reviewed by Douglas E. Winter

.....
*I serve only one Lord and Master:
Dr. Mabuse.*
.....

The essential icon of contemporary horror is not a monster, but a man. Although the art and literature of the 20th Century were haunted by a myriad of supernatural metaphors for the anxieties and trauma experienced by its generations—Darwinism, secular humanism, world war, nuclear technology, post-industrialism, dehumanization, and, as always, xenophobia—their central concern, in retrospect, was one of profound paranoia: a distrust of the sociopolitical fabric and an obsession with tearing it aside in search of the man behind the curtain. The master of puppets. The great deceiver. A Satan for a Godless world.

For cinephiles—and German popular culture—this shadow within the shadows is named Mabuse. Created in 1921 by Norbert Jacques—one of Europe's then-prominent, now-forgotten novelists—Dr. Mabuse (properly pronounced “mah-boo-zah”) captured the imagination of the Fatherland in print and on the silver screen. Evoked in five fictions and thirteen motion pictures—and influencing untold others—his mythology ranges from high art to lowbrow nonsense, essayed and exploited by directors as diverse as the legendary Fritz Lang, French new waver Claude Chabrol, Leni Reifenstahl collaborator Harald Reinl, schlock *auteur* Jess Franco, and feminist iconoclast Ulrike Ottinger.

Mabuse, a doctor of psychiatry, is a gambler extraordinaire whose stakes are the highest imaginable: human life. He is the consummate trickster, the enigmatic element that seems to manage—indeed, to order—chaos. His cunning



and elusiveness are such that the police call him “The Great Unknown.” As noted by David Kalat, in the first comprehensive English-language study of Mabuse, even his name is something other than a name: “It is a sign. It is a password. It is an ideology.”

By virtue of his enthusiasm and scholarship—and by default—Kalat is the premier American authority on Mabuse, and he has distributed, through his Allday Entertainment, two seminal Mabuse films on DVD. His critical analysis is not merely welcome, but also vital to an understanding of a classic strain of European cinema—and its undoubted impact upon the urges of Anglo-American horror and suspense in the waning years of the Twentieth Century.

Kalat pays relatively short shrift to Norbert Jacques' five Mabuse-themed novels, which is not surprising—only the first book, *DR. MABUSE DER*

SPIELER, has been translated into English (as *DR. MABUSE, MAN OF MYSTERY* in 1923). Although Fritz Lang is identified most strongly with Mabuse, it was Jacques who devised, perhaps instinctively, a singularly 20th Century villain, a sobering transition from the underworld mastermind (Conan Doyle's Moriarty, Souvestre-Allain's Fantômas) to the *Überwelt* autocrat—a harbinger of Hitler, to be sure, but also of the political and economic corruption that made him possible.

DR. MABUSE DER SPIELER, serialized in the *BERLINER ILLUSTRIRTE* and published in hardcover in 1922, was an immediate bestseller in Jacques' adopted homeland. Lang, fresh from his first commercial triumph, *DESTINY* [*Der Müde Tod*, "Weary Death," 1921], found the novel ideally suited to his vision of a popular cinema of social critique. Working with his paramour, Thea von Harbou, he adapted the text swiftly but powerfully as a two-part silent epic released in 1922. Intended for viewing on consecutive nights—twenty reels running four-plus hours as *Der Großer Spieler* and *Inferno—Dr. Mabuse der Spieler* [US: *DR. MABUSE THE GAMBLER*] personalized the paranoia and despair of Weimar Germany in its eponymous villain (played by von Harbou's then-husband, Rudolf Klein-Rogge).

"Whether one falls in love and with whom, whether one wins or loses at cards, whether one takes one's own life—such choices may seem to be random or natural or the result of free will, but in fact they are nothing but steps in Mabuse's master plan." [p. 39]

That plan has as its goal nothing so trite as the world domination dreamed of by supervillains from Dr. No to Dr. Evil, but the more sublime and secretive destiny of world manipulation: Mabuse would become the Invisible Master. He haunts the hidden clublife of 1920s Berlin, fleecing the decadent ruling class for entertainment, mind-reading, bending wills to his own, murdering without remorse, devising crimes "whose only effect is to cause horror." A master of deception and disguise, Mabuse undoes romances and stock markets, and embraces technology, using mass production to create counterfeit currency and zombies. ("The individual is nothing," Mabuse later tells us. "The machine is everything.")

Kalat's book is structured as a creative history, exploring the Mabuse canon chronologically within the lives and times of its creators. The intent, like that of Lang's *Dr. Mabuse der Spieler*—originally billed as "A Picture of the Time"—is to consider Mabuse as an imperfect mirror of the 20th Century. "Both on screen and



off," Kalat writes, "the strange case of Dr. Mabuse is a story of love triangles and revenge, of murders and suicides and suspicious deaths, of betrayals and paranoia, of fascism and tyranny, of deceptions and conspiracies, of mistaken identities and *doppelgängers* and pseudonyms, of transformations, of history writ both large and small" (p. 3). Such an investigation is daunting, and Kalat's analysis of 12 central films is wound within extended biographies of Lang, Franco, Chabrol, and producer Artur Brauner; a chronicle of the German film industry; and even a chapter devoted to the rise of the Third Reich.

Most chapters are written as independent essays, which is convenient for reference work, but does make for repetitious digressions when read straight through. As Kalat documents with care, Mabuse haunted Lang's career; its themes and characterizations are echoed in the essential *Spione* [US: *SPIES*, 1928], *M* (1931), and *THE BIG HEAT* (1953)—and, of course, in Lang's farewell to Nazi Germany, *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse* [US: *THE TESTAMENT OF DR. MABUSE*, 1933], a sequel to both the original Mabuse and *M*.

Kalat's critique is thorough, well-considered, and typically immaculate, although in assessing *Das Testament...*, he calls its key image—the name "Mabuse" half-etched, backwards, in a pane

of glass—"a fragmentary, elusive clue, and ultimately a rather unhelpful one." Yet it seems essential, a revelation that Mabuse, dead after a decade in a mental institution, lives on through the asylum's director, Dr. Baum—whose name, spelled backwards, mimes "Mabuse." (It also seems notable that Baum, portrayed literally as a man behind a curtain, shares the last name of the creator of the Wizard of Oz).

Das Testament... was not released in the US until 1952 (in edited form as **THE CRIMES OF DR. MABUSE**); by then, Lang, a legendary tyrant on and off set, was well on his way to becoming a pariah in Hollywood. Infuriated by Joseph Losey's remake of **M** (1951) and tired of producer interference, Lang was lured home by Artur Brauner, whose CCC Film was the unlikely savior of Germany's post-war film industry. Brauner had acquired the rights to the Mabuse character and name from Norbert Jacques, and he offered Lang the opportunity to make an original Mabuse picture. The result was Lang's swansong, **Die Tausend Augen des Dr. Mabuse** [US: **THE 1000 EYES OF DR. MABUSE**, 1960], a precursor of the James Bond genre—and our "reality-based" culture of voyeurism and surveillance—in which a self-appointed Mabuse (Wolfgang Preiss) embraces video and nuclear technologies to exploit identities and emotions.

Perhaps inevitably, Lang and Brauner parted ways, and the producer, intent on creating a film franchise, passed the directoral torch to Harald Reinl. Teamed with screenwriter Ladislav Fodor, Reinl crafted an effective sequel and series-starter, **Im Stahlnetz des Dr. Mabuse** [US: **THE RETURN OF DR. MABUSE**, 1961], and the less satisfactory **Die Unsichtbaren Krallen des Dr. Mabuse** [US: **THE INVISIBLE HORROR**, 1962]. Werner Klingler then helmed a credible remake of **Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse** [US: **TERROR OF THE MAD DOCTOR**, 1962], but the series disintegrated into smaller-budgeted (and smaller-minded) installments with **Scotland Yard jagt Dr. Mabuse** [US: **SCOTLAND YARD VS. DR. MABUSE**, 1963] and **Die Todesstahlen des Dr. Mabuse** [US: **THE DEATH RAY OF DR. MABUSE**, 1964].

Here Kalat's otherwise comprehensive chronology falters: He misses the only American (and apparently unauthorized) take on Dr. Mabuse, as played by Larry Mann in "Invasion from Outer Space," a two-part episode of ABC-TV's brief-lived series **THE GREEN HORNET** (March 10 and 17, 1967). Its footage was later merged with two other episodes for theatrical release as **THE GREEN HORNET** (1974).

A final authorized entry, **La Venganza del Dr. Mabuse** (1970), was lensed by Jess Franco, who co-wrote the script with Brauner; but its indifferent plot and direction tax even the most ardent devotees. Kalat's chapters on Franco and his dubious contribution prove the least satisfactory, if only because he devotes more text to Franco than he does to Norbert Jacques and the Mabuse fiction.

Thankfully, the imaginative power of Mabuse transcended such lesser moments, and a more sincere appreciation is found in the distinctively plotted **SCREAM AND SCREAM AGAIN** (1969), which was retitled for German audiences as **Die Lebenden Leichen des Dr. Mabuse** (literally, "The Living Corpses of Dr. Mabuse," with Vincent Price's Dr. Browning renamed Mabuse). Mabuse was later resurrected in feminine guise (and played by Delphine Seyrig) in Ulrike Ottinger's avant-garde **Dorian Gray im Spiegel der Boulevardpresse** [US: **THE IMAGE OF DORIAN GRAY IN THE YELLOW PRESS**, 1984]; and then found a more coherent and compelling incarnation in Claude Chabrol's under-appreciated **Dr. M** [US: **CLUB EXTINCTION**, 1989]. This prescient *hommage* finds Alan Bates in the title role (named, for copyright reasons, Dr. Marsfeldt), a dyspeptic corporate robber baron intent on sowing terror—and ultimately, self-destruction—through the mass media.

"When mankind becomes ruled by terror," Mabuse reminds us, "then is the hour for the mastery of crime." Kalat's history of this remarkable icon of suspense and horror offers almost everything readers would want to know—except for one thing. The focus of **THE STRANGE CASE OF DR. MABUSE** is such that Kalat's concluding chapter assesses the legacy of Mabuse only as a historical metaphor. It is a fine summation, but it would be interesting to see Kalat take the inevitable next step and consider the burgeoning influence of Mabuse on late 20th Century horror and suspense. Although he mentions **THE USUAL SUSPECTS** (1996) and **ENEMY OF THE STATE** (1998) in passing, he fails, surprisingly, even to note Mabuse's most obvious successor, Thomas Harris's Hannibal Lecter—like Mabuse, a psychiatrist confined to prisons and asylums, yet supremely capable of exerting his will upon external reality through manipulation and mimicry.

As entertaining as it is edifying, **THE STRANGE CASE OF DR. MABUSE** is more than a labor of love: It is significant contribution to film scholarship—and well worth investigation.





By Douglas E. Winter

*The Watchdog's Guide
to Finding Film Music
Part 1*

It's one thing to hear great film music—or to read about it—but quite another to find that music on compact disc. A myriad of factors, from marketing decisions to licensing complications to indifference, make film scores the lost, if not black, sheep of the motion picture industry—tended with little care for the listener. When issued at all, a typical domestic score is given a small pressing and no publicity, and receives no reviews from the mainstream or the music press. And then there are limited edition and archival and foreign and grey market releases, distributed haphazardly and in even smaller numbers.

Audio Watchdog does its best to keep readers advised about the exceptional, the intriguing, and the eclectic offerings from the wonderland of film music; and there are a handful of soundtrack magazines that chronicle the Hollywood mainstream. But finding soundtrack CDs remains something of an art, unless your tastes are fulfilled by the latest from James Horner or John Williams.

In this two-part guide, your Audio Watchdog will try to lead listeners toward those elusive scores, and perhaps even help you find that personal Holy Grail among soundtracks.

The Search

We start at Square One: Confirming that the music is available on compact disc—and that the disc actually contains the music we want, not a compilation of songs issued as film merchandise. Keep in mind, too, that music heard in trailers is usually *not* from the score of the advertised film. Soundtrack.net offers a searchable database that can help identify the original source of trailer music, which is often taken from another film. It also has a database of all DVDs that feature isolated musical scores, which may moot the need to purchase a compact disc.

To track current releases, this column and soundtrack magazines are useful, but not comprehensive. My favorites among the American journals are FILM SCORE MONTHLY (8503 Washington Blvd., Culver City, CA 90232; www.filmscoremonthly.com); and SOUNDTRACK (c/o Super Collector, 12072 Brookhurst St., Garden Grove, CA 92840; www.soundtrackmag.com). Both also have informative websites.

The Internet is a godsend for film music fans, since it provides a remarkable, if sometimes frustrating, search tool. Standard search engines are best for initial exploration; for example, if we use Google.com to seek out one of my long-time “wants”—the Frankie Chan and Roel A. Garcia score for Wong Kar-Wai's **ASHES OF TIME**—we find a website in tribute to the music, complete with a track listing and photographs of the packaging and booklet—and learn that the score was released on CD by Rock Records & Tapes (Hong Kong). But... sigh... the disc is long out of print.

Our next step? A more refined search, mounted through websites created by soundtrack enthusiasts—notably www.scorelogue.com/links, which provides a remarkable springboard to sites of record labels, composers, dealers, fans, etc. Or, for out-of-print or collector's items, a classified ad in a soundtrack magazine—which is offered free to subscribers of FILM SCORE MONTHLY.

Or we proceed, like the best of private detectives, with a little footwork.

Retailers

Forget Sam Goody and the other mall regulars, unless you're looking to pay list price for music “inspired by” the latest wannabe

blockbuster; but the three major international chains—Tower Records, Virgin, and HMV—are well worth a visit, and their larger stores are typically well-stocked with soundtracks, including imports.

The prime retail resources are soundtrack specialty stores; but they're few and far between, and usually found only in major metropolitan areas. My personal favorites are Footlight Records, 113 East 12th Street, New York, NY 10003 (www.footlight.com); and Super Collector, 9862 Chapman Avenue, Garden Grove, CA 92841 (www.supercollector.com)—as well as Aron's Records, 1150 N. Highland Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90038 (www.aronsrecords.com), which is arguably the best all-around record store in the United States.

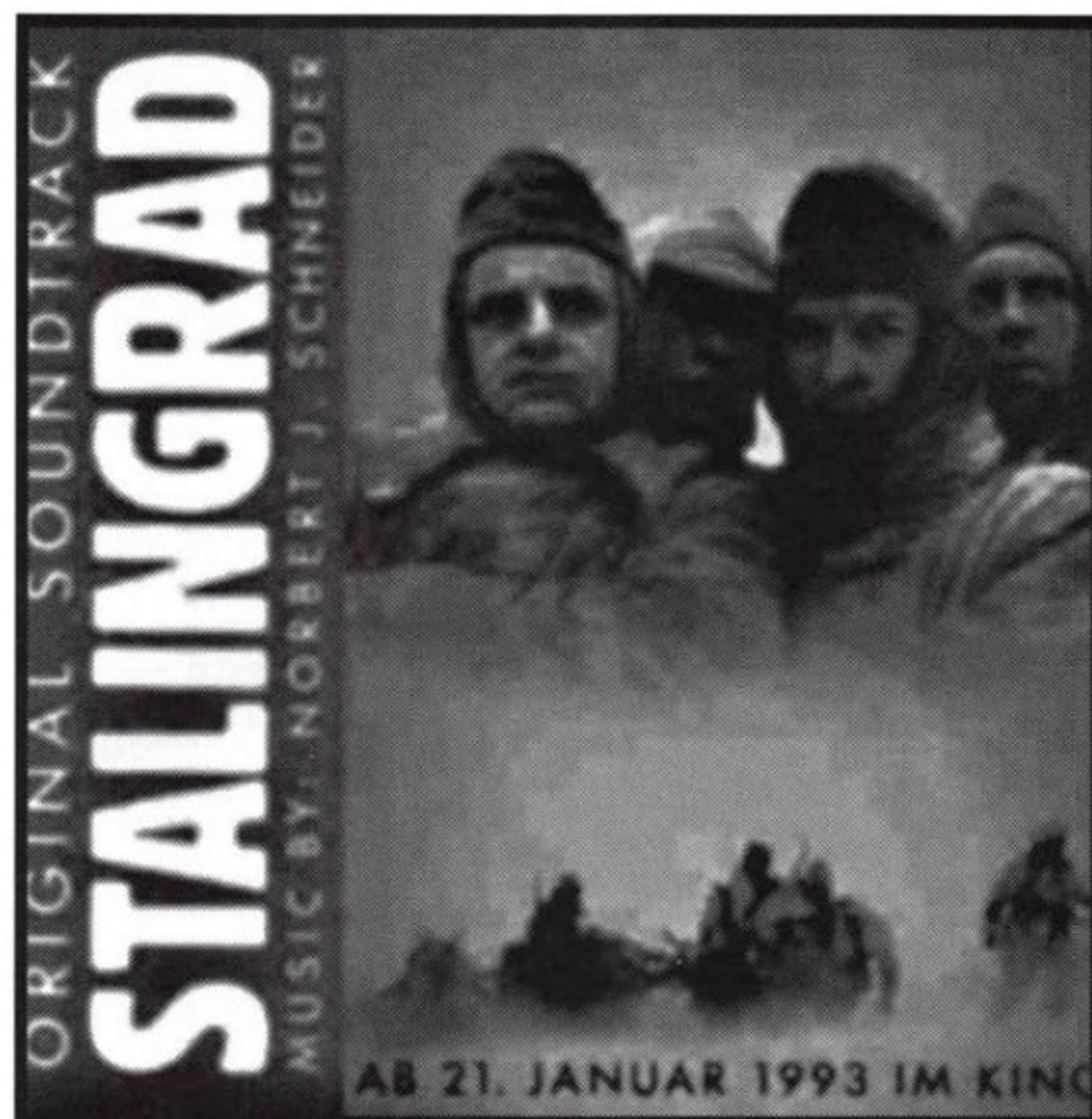
Only among these specialty stores might I have some hope of stumbling upon another long-time "want," the Norbert Jürgen Schneider score for **STALINGRAD**, which was issued only in Germany. No luck. So we cast the net further.

Mail Order

For most readers, particularly those in pursuit of international releases and smaller pressings, the only practical approach is mail order, whether through print catalogues or the Internet. Most soundtrack specialists, including the retail stores noted above, provide these services—or, indeed, sell only by mail or the internet. The two major internet booksellers, Amazon.com and BN.com, are fine sources for domestic CDs (often at a discount), and Amazon.com in particular is worth checking for European imports. In fact, if you're willing to pay for international postage, you should also check with Amazon's UK, French, and German sites, which also sell Region 2 DVDs—where I learn that the **STALINGRAD** soundtrack is also out of print.

In truth, only the specialists are able to deliver international and esoteric discs with regularity. When dealing by mail—and especially the Internet—with soundtrack sellers, *caveat emptor*: Stay away from eBay, which is fraught with overpriced and illegitimate product, and remember that it's always best to work with established and reputable dealers.

In the United States, the choice Internet/mail order services are Screen Archives Entertainment (P.O. Box 550, Linden, VA 22642-0500; www.screenarchives.com) and Sound



Track Album Retailers (1176 Brownstone Ridge, PO Box 487, New Holland, PA 17557-0487; www.soundtrak.com). In Europe, I recommend Hillside Productions (c/o Lionel Woodman, 1 Woodstock Road, Strood, Rochester, Kent ME2 2DL, England) and Intermezzo Media (Piazza Aspromonte 13, 20131 Milano, Italy; www.intermezzomedia.com), which also offer hard-to-find vinyl releases from the continent. Catalogues from these four dealers, and the three retail stores noted earlier, are available on line or by request.

But still... no listings for **ASHES OF TIME** or **STALINGRAD**. This means we turn our attention west, toward two reliable Japanese websites (in English): www.cdjapan.co.jp and www.arksquare.com, which also market Region 3 DVDs. After mastering their clumsy search designs, with persistence we find a Japanese edition **ASHES OF TIME** at both sites—and in the process learn that many out-of-print and otherwise unavailable scores have been reissued in Japan. The only drawback is the expense of Japanese CDs and, of course, the postage.

As for **STALINGRAD**, we've exhausted the traditional channels. Now it's time to consider the grey market—and the murky realm of bootlegs—into which we'll descend next issue.

Review materials should be sent c/o One Eyed Dog, PO Box 27305, Washington DC 20038. The Audio Watchdog is on-line at OnEyeDog@aol.com.



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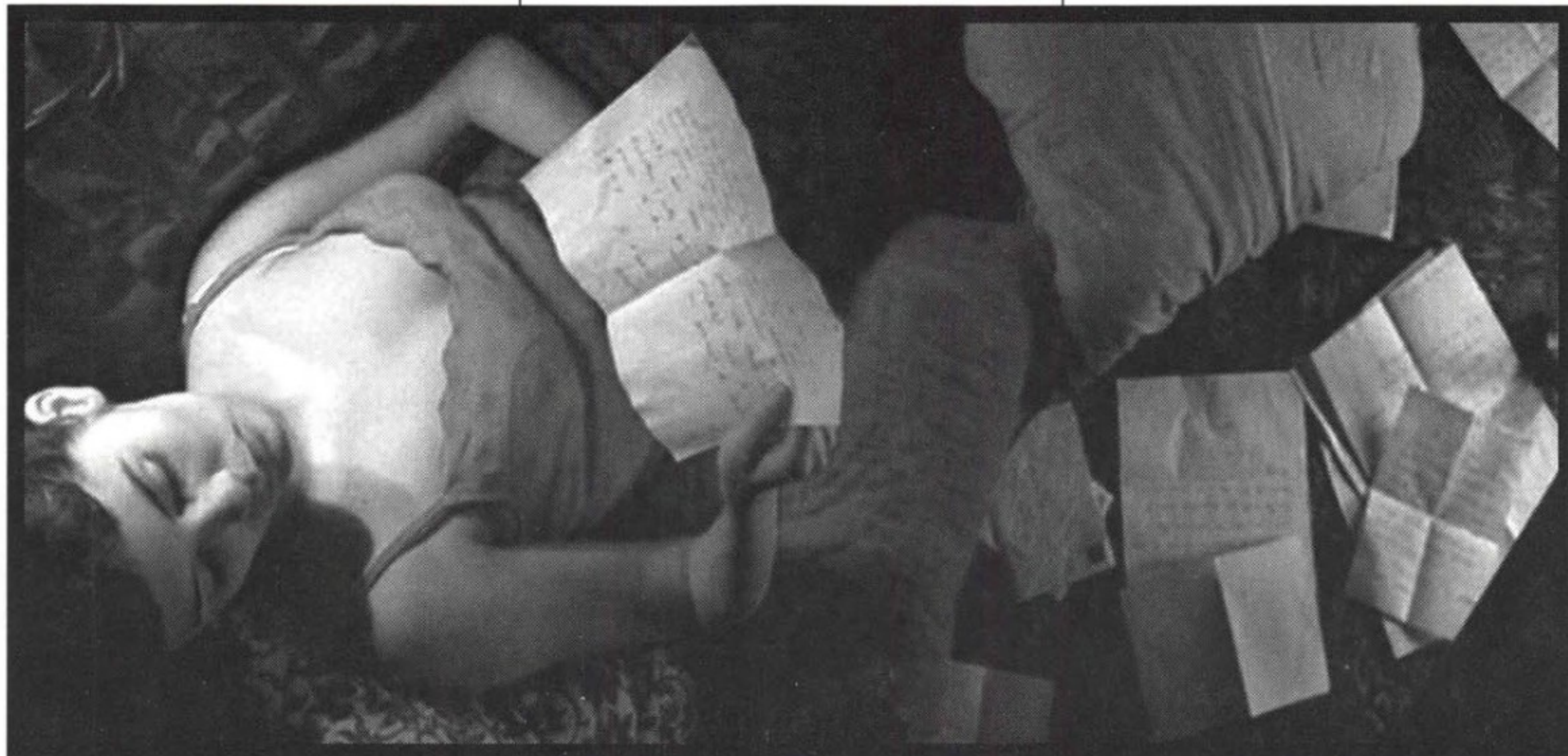
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THE LETTERBOX



EQUAL KNOCKS AND MAZELTOFS

I'm reading my way through VW #88, starting as usual with the letters and Joe Dante's reviews, and saw your comments following his review of **EQUINOX**. Actually, **EQUINOX** had absolutely no influence on the "Evil Dead" movies, because Sam Raimi and Rob Tapert had never even heard of **EQUINOX**, much less seen it, when they made the first two ED movies. Both of them are quite forthcoming about other movies that influenced them (primarily, **NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD**, **LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT** and **THE HILLS HAVE EYES**), so I see no reason to question their assertion that they have (to the date I asked them about this) never seen the movie at all. They were asked about it by fans from time to time, which puzzled them.

About **EQUINOX** itself: it was first completed in 1967 or 1968. Dennis Muren—who has (literally) almost enough Oscars to make a football team—was the original director, working from a script by Mark McGee (later billed as Mark Thomas McGee). I happened to be at Forry Ackerman's house when, first, Dennis came by with the news that he'd sold the film to Jack H. Harris—and later in the week, Harris himself came by with the same news. Muren was quiet and philosophical about it, but felt they had made a good deal. Harris was gleeful, and had the same idea. So if they each separately thought they had made a good deal, I guess they had made a good deal.

After Harris bought the film—quite a while after—he hired Jack Woods to shoot some additional scenes, including all those with himself. He doesn't appear in the Muren-directed version, nor is

there an equivalent character. I'm not sure why Woods claimed sole credit for writing and directing, probably because the original cut was made by friends barely out of their teens who'd never worked on a movie before. The seasoned old pro of the bunch was Jim Danforth, who, I think, did not do any animation for the movie, but did have a small role. (I think he may not appear in the Woods/Harris version, but I'm not sure.)

The reason the cast's ages seem wrong is because they age several years between the Muren and the Woods footage, sometimes in back-to-back cuts. I've heard there may be an Anchor Bay release of **EQUINOX**; since that company seems reasonably responsible, I think they should be informed of the earlier cut of **EQUINOX**, and include it on the

Audrey Tautou, wallowing in correspondence, in AMÉLIE.

SOURCES

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(hypothetical) DVD along with the Woods/Harris cut.

[On another topic:] When I saw you had devoted umpyump pages to the production history of **WATCHER IN THE WOODS**, my initial reaction was to sigh, and assume that as a Good Subscriber, I might as well read it. Well, wipe the egg off my face. It was a *terrific* article from beginning to end, fascinating in detail and admirable in execution. I'd like to see some other films given that kind of treatment, though it's true that few genre films have undergone those kinds of changes or problems. And when they have (as with **THE FOG**), the makers usually aren't exactly eager to talk to journalists about them. So congratulations on being a better editor than I would have been. Again, a topnotch article on a surprising subject.

Bill Warren
Los Angeles CA

INSPECTOR GORDON FILES HIS REPORT

I was fascinated by your reviews of **THE CRIMSON CIRCLE** and **THE TERROR** in VW #88. I once distributed the entire Rialto-Film package of German-made English-dubbed Edgar Wallace thrillers to television in the USA.

In recounting the history of **THE CRIMSON CIRCLE**, you refer to a German remake of 1929. There was an English version made at the same time, which Sinclair Hill directed, and it is interesting to note that Edgar Wallace himself played a cameo role in it; I believe it is the only time he ever did so. By the way, the correct title of Rialto's first Wallace film is **Der Frosch mit der Maske**, not "**Die Frosche mit der Maske**."

The English dubbing of the Rialto series was split between

Paris, where Peter Riethof directed them, and New York, where I supervised them at Titra Studios in Times Square. Riethof was at that time the leading producer/director of English dubbed versions in Europe. (He also directed the English track of **PLAYGIRLS AND THE VAMPIRE**.)

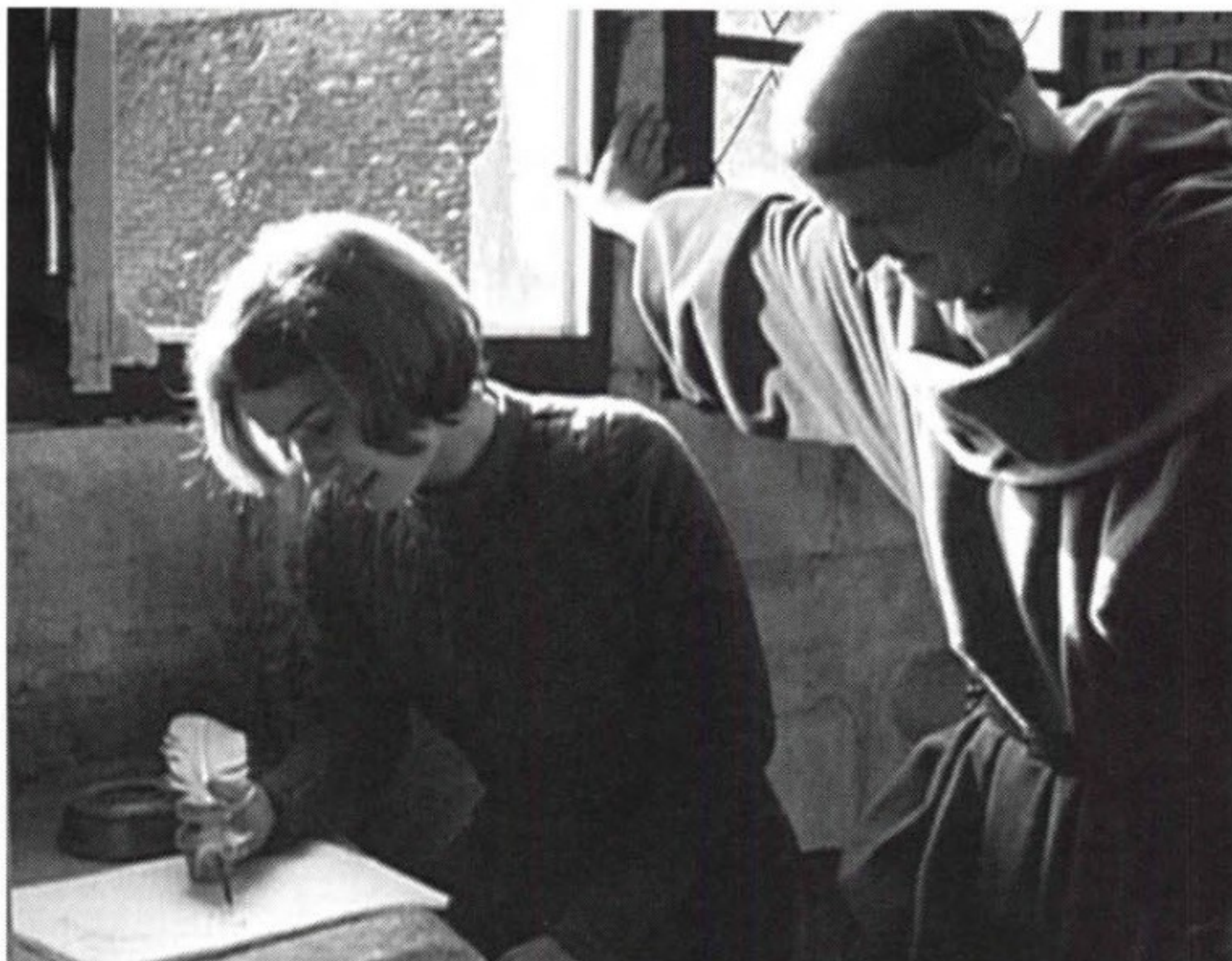
Rialto certainly got its money's worth out of **THE TERROR** by using it for two remakes. By the way, the correct German titles were **Der Umheimliche Mönch** and **Der Mönch mit der Peitsche**. The original play was so popular in England that it was not only novelized as **TERROR KEEP** but there was, in the 1930s, even a comic strip version of it published daily in a London newspaper under the novel's title. It was my first exposure to Edgar Wallace.

Horst Wendlandt, the producer of the Rialto series, sadly died of cancer in Berlin on August 30, at the age of 80. He is also remembered for the phenomenally successful series of Karl May Westerns which were made in Germany, with locations in Yugoslavia, and starred (among others) Lex Barker, Stewart Granger and Rod Cameron. This series, although distributed outside Germany by Columbia Pictures (and in one instance, Warner Bros.), never achieved any recognition in the United States.

Thanks to you, I am ordering a copy of Rialto's **THE CRIMSON CIRCLE** from Sinister Cinema and will enjoy watching it again.

Richard Gordon
Gordon Films
New York NY

*My favorite bit of Edgar Wallace krimi trivia is that, in the English dub of Rialto's **THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE FROG**, Joachim Fuchsberger plays Inspector... Richard Gordon!*



Sandrine Bonnaire puts quill to parchment in *JOAN THE MAID*.

NOTES FROM THE TOMB

It's nice to see more and more silents reviewed again in VW lately, and I was especially pleased to note Richard Harland Smith's favorable comments on **THE INDIAN TOMB** [VW 88:64]. I was amused to read, though, that he attributes that release's new musical setting to me (if so, with a somewhat unique spelling). Of course, the praise for this wonderful score is entirely due to Eric Beheim, who has worked on a number of David Shepard's silent film releases with the various incarnations of his virtual silent film orchestra. There's an interesting piece by the composer, focussing on this particular score, at http://www.digitalprosound.com/2001/03_mar/features/maharajah1.htm. My own contribution to the DVD, the new English titles, was separate and rather minor, so the final result, thanks to David's sparkling transfer and the new score, was as fresh and surprising to me as to any other viewer.

Also, it was nice to read that RHS rightly attributes the somewhat slow nature of parts of the film on May's direction (the kind of pacing that often prompted extensive cuts for the US release versions of the German silent epics), rather than joining in the frame rate bashing that had been prompted by this particular release.

By the way, Lang's own **INDIAN TOMB** remake [**THE INDIAN TOMB** and **THE TIGER OF ESCHNAPUR**] is now also available in Germany (R2, PAL), but I hear the US release [from Fantoma] is far superior in quality, so even R2 area residents might want to seek out the Fantoma version.

Ulrich Ruedel
Copenhagen, Denmark

HEY JOE

I was so taken with Blue Underground's **EUGENIE... THE STORY OF HER JOURNEY INTO PERVERSION** (it's taken the place of **BEYOND THE VALLEY OF THE DOLLS** as my favorite

film of all time—for the moment at least) that I revisited Joe Dante's review of the film in the "Fleapit Flashbacks" column [VW 84:24] and was pretty surprised by his lukewarm response to it. Likewise his review of **COFFY** [in VW 89:23] ("Pam Grier's lack of talent"?). Of course, they're just opinions, but I am wondering if Joe's opinions have changed over the years as some of these films have developed rabid cult followings and have endured countless re-examinations from critics? Did Joe manage to see a screener for Blue Underground's **EUGENIE...**? I'd love to know if he's "turned over a new leaf," so to speak.

Casey Scott
Fairfax VA

As Joe wrote in the Introduction to his debut "Fleapit" column [VW 83:20]: "If I was writing about movies today, I doubt my tone would be quite so flip as it is here. And although I think I was pretty hard on some of these titles, this is what I thought of them at the time and I make no apologies." So you can assume his views on some titles have changed. We asked Joe about **EUGENIE...** and **COFFY** in particular, and he told us: "Actually I haven't seen either of those since I wrote the reviews. My opinion of Pam Grier has since been elevated considerably, but probably because she's become a much more assured and relaxed actress over the years. I suspect my views on her performance in **COFFY** might be the same, but as I said, I haven't seen it in decades. Same for **EUGENIE...**, the Nicolai score for which I've been searching for years. Two more DVD rediscoveries in my future!" We immediately sent Joe a copy of the soundtrack to hasten his own, personal journey into perversion!



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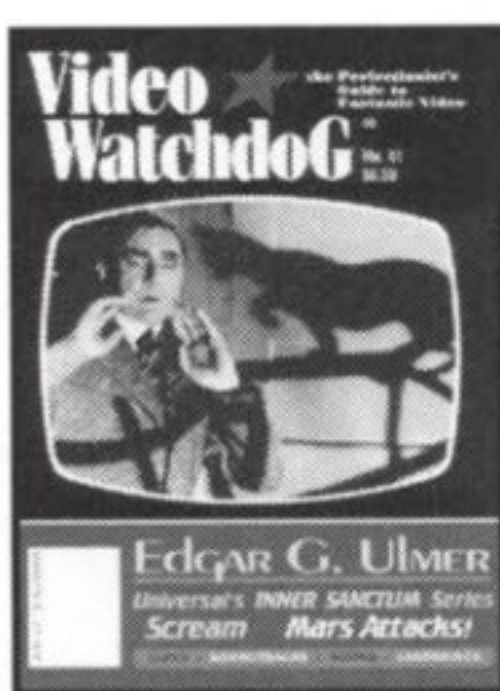
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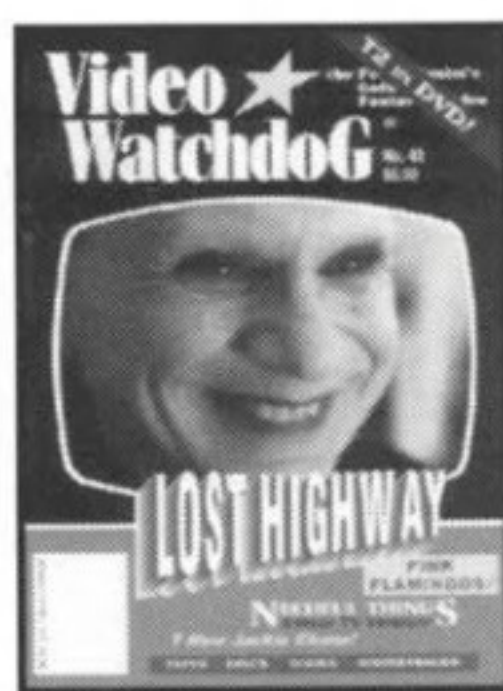
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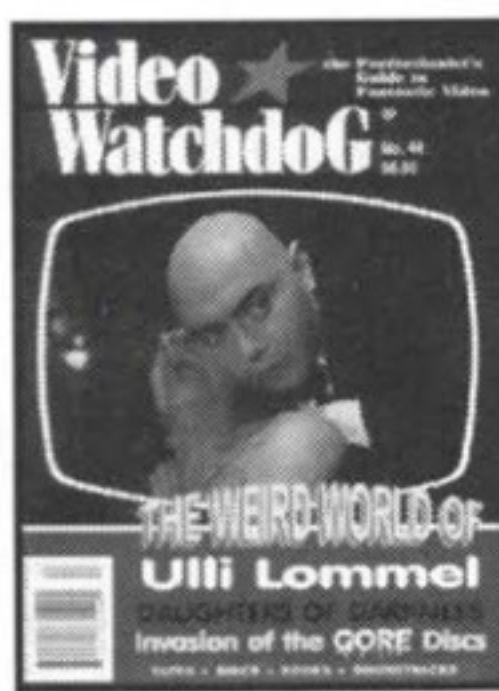
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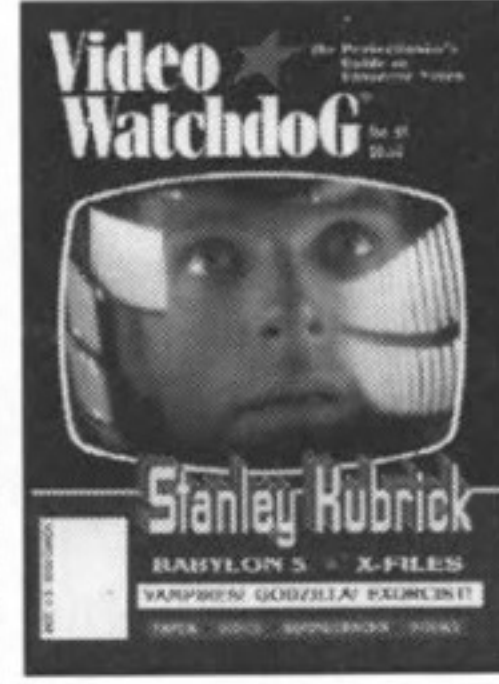
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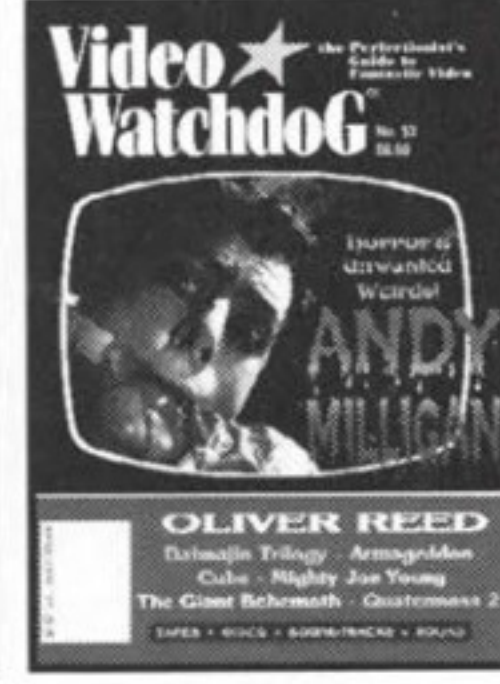
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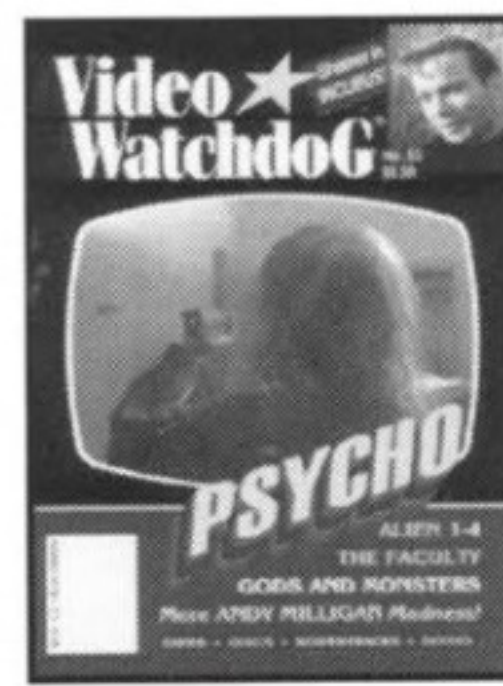
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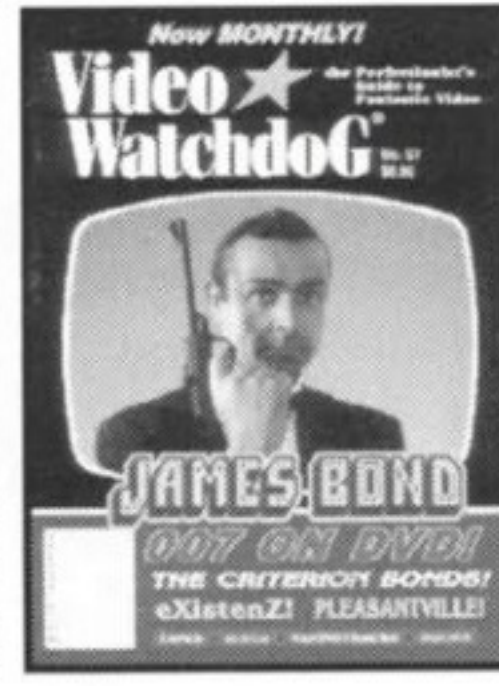
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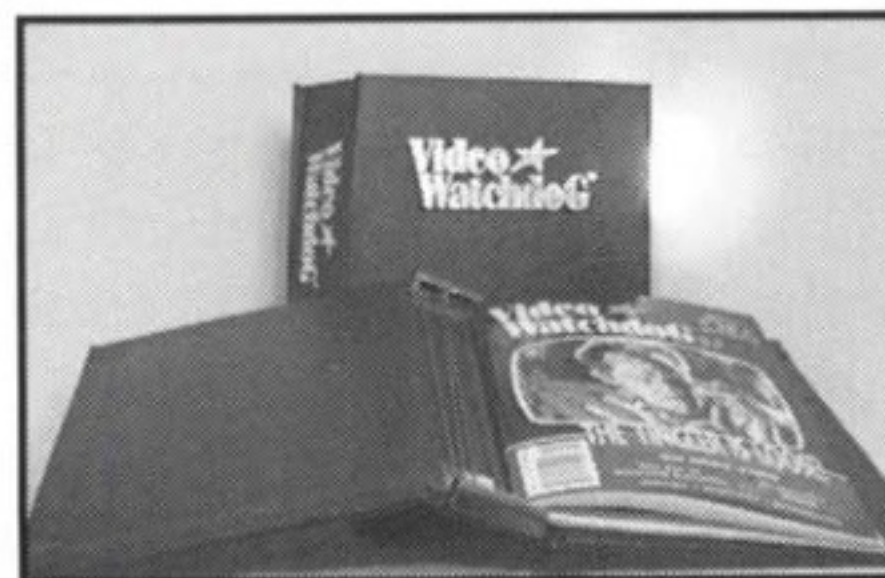
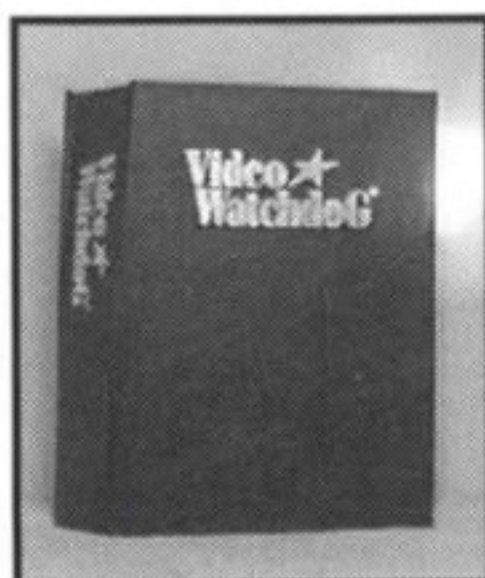


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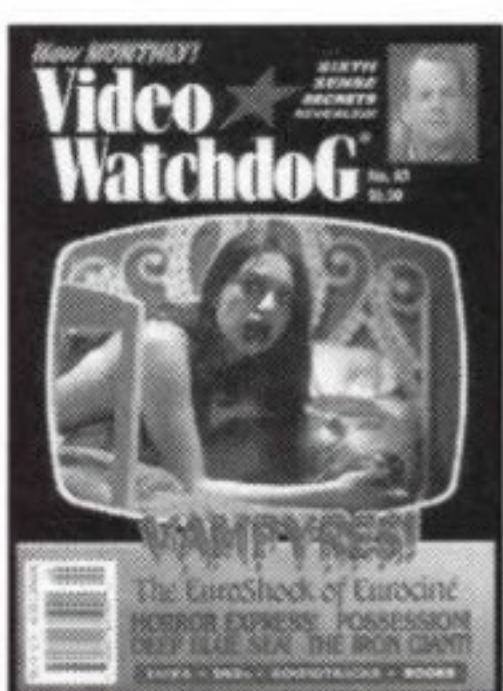
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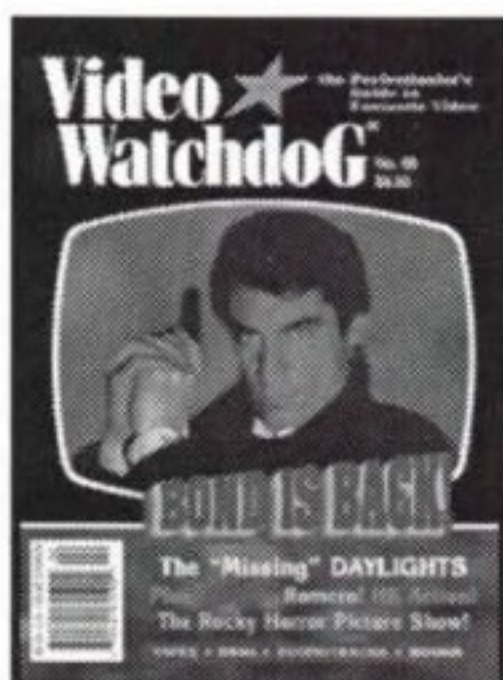
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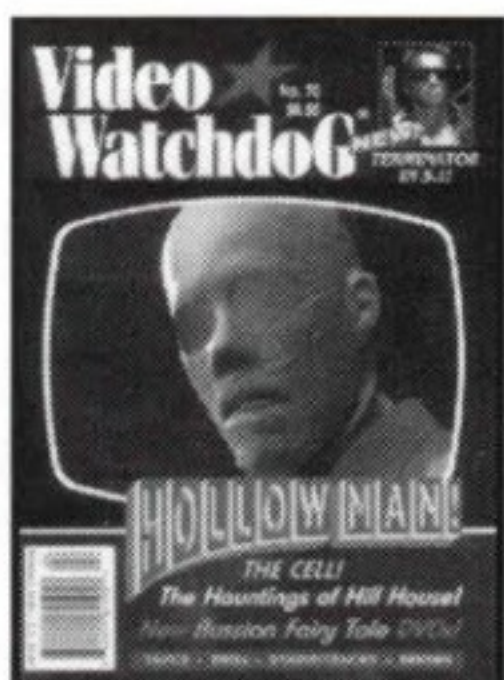
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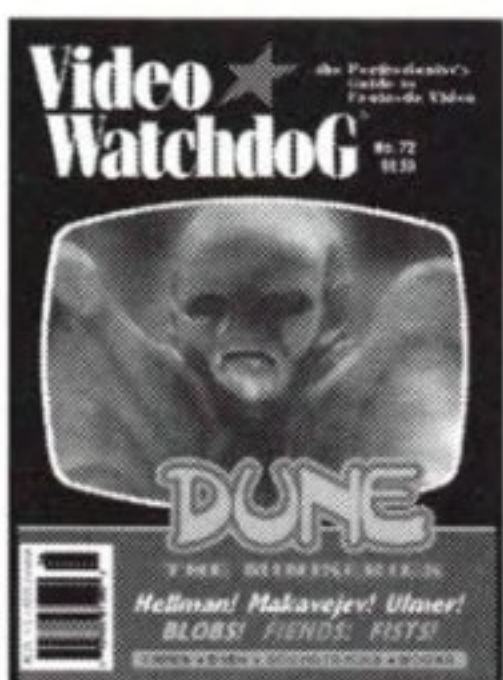
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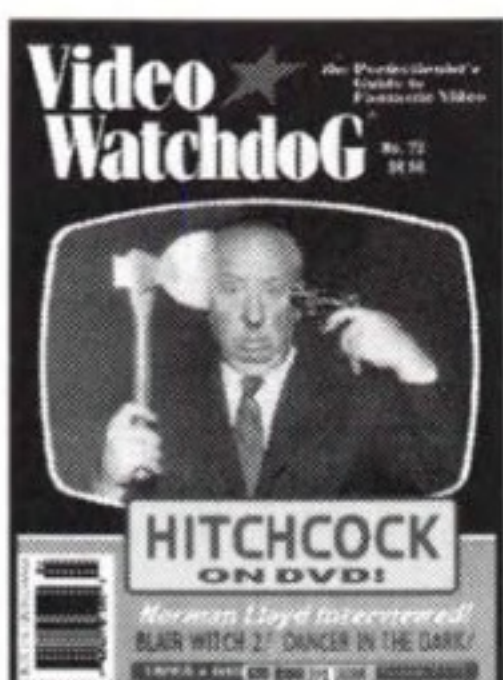
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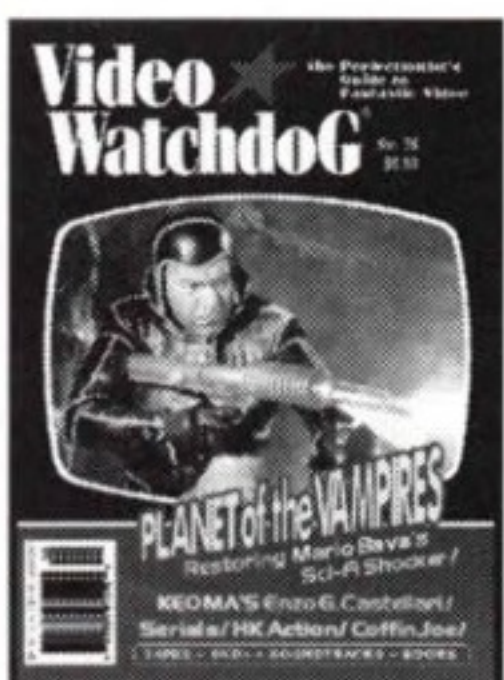
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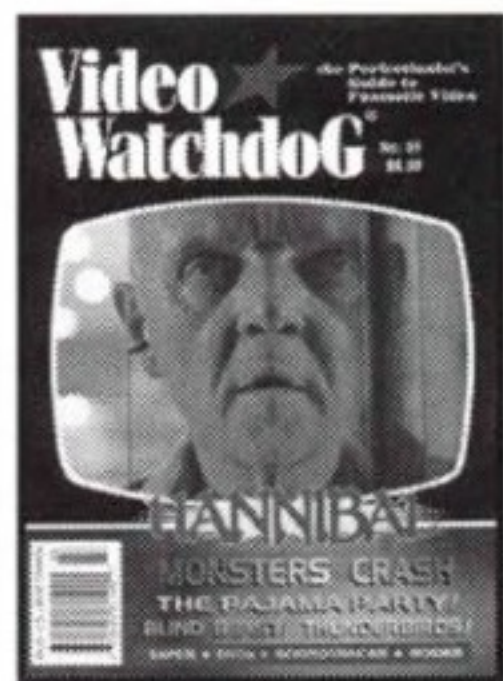
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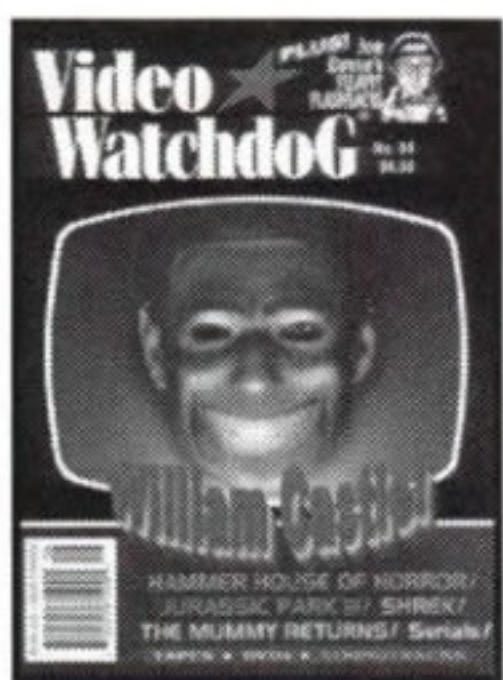
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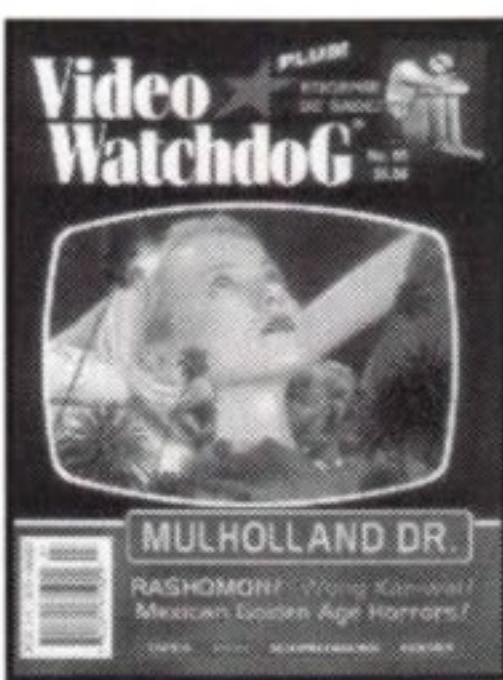
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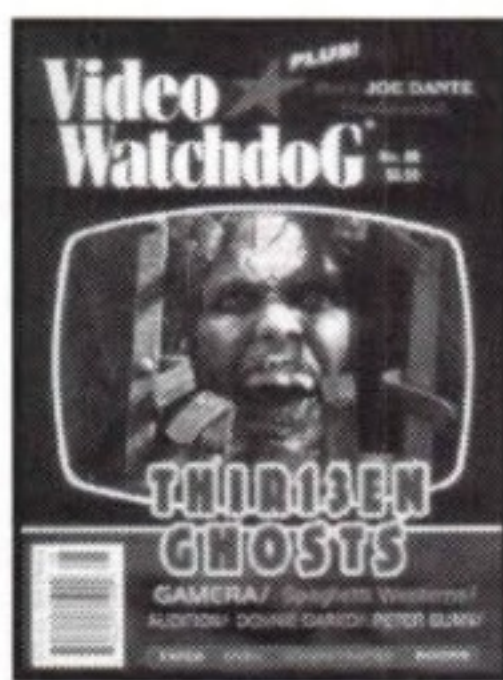
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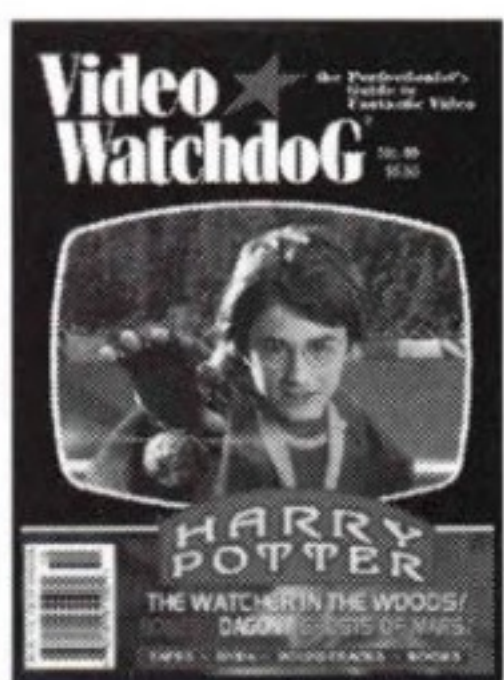
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